



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK
MALTA

Listening and giving a voice

2007

Employment challenges and opportunities for persons experiencing social exclusion and poverty

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FORWARD

EAPN Malta commissioned a research exercise and report which would acknowledge and echo the voices of socially excluded persons in Malta and their concerns vis-à-vis employment issues.

EAPN Malta is a network of 53 NGOs and groups fighting poverty and social exclusion in Malta. EAPN Malta was set up in 2004. It is affiliated to EAPN – a network of 21 national networks and European organisations whose main activities are related to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Last year we carried out a survey and we had focused on the quality of life in general. This year we chose to focus on Employment challenges and opportunities for persons experiencing social exclusion and poverty.

Why did we choose to focus on employment? Some may say that politically it's fashionable. However, our key reasons are that we believe that access to employment is one of the key means to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. Work does not provide income only but helps people to build social networks, to integrate, to have dignity and access other goods and services to have a good quality of life. We also believe that employment is not the only solution to getting people out of poverty and social exclusion. NGOs working with people facing difficulties and the people themselves who are facing challenges to be included in society and to come out of poverty, know very well that accessing the labour market is not easy and is sometimes impossible. Therefore this requires us, (policy makers, NGOs, unions and employers) to come together with the very people who are facing such challenges and difficulties to find realistic solutions and recommend policies that move towards the eradication of social exclusion and poverty.

We have organised a number of focus groups with the people that our member organisations work with on a daily basis. The key aim of this exercise is not an academic one. It is a means to **listen** and **to give a voice** to persons facing difficulty especially to access and survive the labour market. The EAPN Malta Coordination Committee agreed that we should not 'contaminate the report' with our ideas but to present and highlight the challenges and recommendations as expressed by the participants. We are aware that some of the recommendations made, for example for specific services, already exist. However, such recommendations may mean that we may have a lack of communication and information regarding some services. Therefore we appeal that the information presented in this report is used simply as a means to provoke a discussion rather than to debate who is right or wrong.

We hope that in the coming years we will look at other areas that effect people facing social exclusion and or poverty. Areas will include access to health, to education, to entertainment, arts and culture, transport and other goods and services. Our focus will remain that of **listening** and **giving a voice** to persons facing difficulties.

It is hoped that the insightful research findings and report will be serve as an informative tool feeding into national policy and measures addressing social exclusion and employment.



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Chairman

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Dar Merhba Bik

Paolo Freire Institute

Richmond Foundation

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Caritas Malta

SOS Malta

Emigrants Commission

European Centre of Gerontology, University of Malta

National Association of Pensioners

YMCA Malta

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1. INTRODUCTION

European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Malta was set up in May 2004 as a network of Maltese NGOs involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. EAPN Malta has 53 member organisations to-date and is a member of EAPN which is a network of 21 national networks and European organisations whose main activities are related to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

EAPN Malta's main aim is to bring together all those with the capacity and the will to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. One of the core roles and functions of EAPN Malta is to seek to influence the national action plans for social inclusion and to impact the national policies regarding the eradication of poverty. Main strategies set up by EAPN Malta to fulfil this role and function included the founding of a system of Target Group Committees, as well as the setting up of focus group research to facilitate the participation of persons facing or risking poverty and social exclusion.

This research report documents the carrying out of focus group research to reflect the drive of EAPN Malta to continue aiding the development of existing national strategies for social protection and social inclusion in Malta. Drawing inspiration from the strengths and recommendations found in previous EAPN Malta projects - such as EAPN Malta recommendations for the NAP 2006-2008, EAPN Malta response to the draft National Action Plan 2006-2008, and EAPN Malta assessment of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2004-2006 plus Light Update Report 2005 - this report records the interest of EAPN Malta to give a voice to subaltern social sectors¹. Although poverty and social inclusion/exclusion are related to various aspects of life - ranging from employment to education, culture and leisure, housing to social welfare - limited time and human resources compelled EAPN Malta to limit its focus to employment. EAPN Malta reflects the Government of Malta's belief that employment is imperative in the achievement of economic independence and the promotion of social integration. This is especially true in times of post-industrialism and consumerism where a 'normal life' is one which is preoccupied with the making of choices among the wide variety of publicly displayed opportunities for pleasurable sensations and lively experiences.

Specific populations taking part in the focus group sessions - which dealt with the relationship between employment and unemployment on one hand, and social exclusion and inclusion on the other - included female victims of domestic violence, persons with literacy challenges, older persons (60+), third country nationals, persons suffering from mental illness, persons with disabilities, persons with a history of substance abuse, homeless persons, and ex-convicts. The focus groups were carried out by an EAPN Malta moderator during July, August and September 2007. Compared to previous EAPN Malta endeavours, the uniqueness of this research project is that the participants taking part in the focus groups were all persons facing poverty and social exclusion rather than simply conducting interview meetings with NGO representatives.

This report is divided in six sections in addition to related appendices. Following a preliminary section that introduces the research project, the second part provides some necessary information on the background context. Consequently, the third and four sections present the rationale for study and the

¹ These reports can be accessed from the EAPN Malta website : <http://www.eapnmalta.org/page.asp?p=7041>

chief methodological concerns. The presentation of results and recommendations arising from the focus groups are found in the fifth section. This contains three subsections, namely the key challenges being faced by socially excluded persons:

- (i) when seeking employment,
- (ii) when they are outside employment and facing social exclusion and poverty
- (iii) and, when holding part- or full-time employment.

A seminar was organized on the 4th of October so as to present this report to the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity and other related government bodies in view of feeding more progressive and critical ideas into the *National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion* and *National Reform Programme*.

Prior to the commencement of the report, it is opportune to provide the definitions of the terms 'poverty' and 'social exclusion/inclusion'. Poverty refers to a lack of money or material possessions, a situation experienced by many individuals when they find themselves excluded from participating in the formal labour force. The European Commission in its 2004 Joint Report on Social Exclusion defined the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty as follows :

People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate healthcare and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted. European.

Commission, Joint Report on Social Inclusion, 2004: 10

With respect to the notion of 'social exclusion/inclusion', one notes that in social science literature the struggle for the right definition for such terms has emerged as a fierce bone of contention. These two concepts have gained academic, political, and popular currency exactly because they have no precise definition and means lots of different things to people. However, this research report finds inspiration in Atkinson's (1998) location of three main elements in most discussions on social exclusion/inclusion - namely, relativity, agency and dynamics. One cannot judge whether or not a person is socially excluded by looking at his or her circumstances in isolation since concrete implementation of any criterion for exclusion has to take account of the activities of others (exclusion often manifests itself in terms of communities rather than individuals, an illustration being the use by financial institutions of street postcodes for purposes of credit rating). Moreover, exclusion implies an act, with an agent or agents, where people may be excluded from the market economy by the decisions of banks who do not give credit, or insurance companies who will not provide cover. Third, one cannot overlook that people are excluded not just because they are currently without a job or income but because they have little prospects for the future.

2 THE BACKGROUND CONTEXT

2.1 The National Action plan on Social Inclusion

The Government of Malta has long been committed towards the promotion of a better quality of life for all older persons, social groups and future generations. Planning efforts towards an increase in social integration levels can be found in key government documents such as the *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2004-2006* and its *Light 2005 Update*, and the *National Strategy Report on Pensions 2005* (Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2004; 2005a, 2005b). These documents indicated that the government was guided by the philosophy that social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care are not for the privileged few but for all individuals irrespective of their social and health status. The most recent effort of update such documents is found in the (second) *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2006-2008* [NAP] (Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005). The NAP focused on four over-arching policy priorities, namely: empowering social cohesion, building stronger communities, strengthening the voluntary sector, and networking the social welfare sector.

Empowering Social Cohesion

Recognising that individual change is fundamental for community development and social change, the NAP advocated the focusing of strategic actions towards protecting, maximizing, and empowering the emancipatory potential of children and young persons through various reforms and initiatives. The rights of children and young persons were also promoted and observed, with the NAP pledging that Malta shall actively consider the (i) development of primary prevention programmes targeting homophobia and promoting social diversity, (ii) the institution of secondary prevention and “diversionary” services, (iii) strengthening of the Probation Service Unit and other services ancillary to the juvenile justice system; and (iv) introduction of victim-offender reconciliation, parole and prison aftercare systems particularly in relation to youth offenders. The NAP placed the following objectives to promote the social inclusion of children and young persons :

- on-going reforms in the education sector promoting opportunities for both formal and informal learning, personal development and creativity;
- the recently set up Department for Social Welfare Standards which is specifically responsible for (a) establishing standards and protocols of practice, and (b) monitoring implementation of services;
- the planned introduction of adoption and foster care legislation, which should facilitate further the role of various professionals;
- further ongoing research and evaluation studies, and information campaigns which (a) have increase public awareness on children’s and young persons’ rights and welfare issues, and (b) bring together various people who are working with children, particularly with those at risk of poverty;
- greater emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches that focus on prevention and early intervention programmes; and

- the setting-up of an inter-ministerial task-force on juvenile justice with the remit to identify and map pathways for development in the sector.

Building Stronger Communities

The NAP also recognized that an enhanced and effective social inclusion require a holistic community-based approach, and advocated the introduction of initiatives that horizontally focus across various vulnerable groups. Acknowledging the need for de-centralized welfare provision, the necessity of prevention and early intervention programmes to assist people from becoming increasingly vulnerable and social excluded, and the importance to ensure that socio-economic benefits facilitate beneficiaries' social participation and inclusion, the NAP called for the adoption of a strategic and legal framework that safeguards the rights of vulnerable people who are most likely to find themselves at risk of social exclusion. Thus, it identified a number of other legislative and policy lacunae - namely the need to:

- evaluate existing legislation concerning family matters;
- control gambling and the consumption of alcohol amongst minors;
- combat discrimination of minority groups;
- promote integration and tolerance for diversity;
- curb human trafficking; and
- strengthen gender mainstreaming.

Moreover, NAP emphasised for the need to create more factual awareness on existing and emerging social issues so as to facilitate informed and coherent public responses towards vulnerable groups and eliminate or reduce the stigma arising from unfounded fears and lack of tolerance.

Strengthening the Voluntary Sector

Acknowledging the vital role played by non-government organisations, the NAP recorded the government's commitment to further empower and strengthen the voluntary sector. This was especially evident in its pledge to set up a legal structure that formally recognizes and co-ordinates the input of the various voluntary organisations. Here, the NAP recognised the need for promoting better partnerships between the State, the private sector and civil society organisations in the implementation of policies - as well as the enhancement of networking, collaboration and co-ordination so as to avoid duplication of work and maximise deployment of resources. Moreover, it committed the government to act as the principal catalyst for structured dialogue and on-going, meaningful consultation between all the pivotal stakeholders in the social welfare sector. The following pledges contained in the NAP enforce the government's belief in the need to prevent poverty and social exclusion with the help of non-governmental organisations:

- continue to develop its legislative structures with a view to facilitate the development and active participation of voluntary organisations; and
- promote transparency, accountability, networking and collaboration with a view to enhance the effectiveness of the Maltese voluntary sector.

Networking the Social Welfare Sector

Since the promotion of social inclusion does not depend only on the range of available services but relies on the disposition and ability of all stakeholders to coordinate their initiatives and input, the NAP called for Malta to strengthen the networking resources between the agencies providing such services. Since effective networking arises from collaboration and co-operation based on regular dialogue amongst all stakeholders with a view to achieve common goals and objectives, stakeholders must overcome the challenges of differences in work practices, a sense of competitiveness and territoriality, delays triggered by bureaucratic processes, staff turnover, conflicting interpretation of policies and laws. Thus, NAP advocates for networking to take place at all levels of society and amongst all stakeholders to yield effective collaboration and co-operation. Although it is acknowledged that such a measure is a lengthy and taxing process that requires commitment and motivation from all stakeholders, the NAP also recognised that such an approach will in the long-term produce positive and cost-effective results. As more attention is given to the importance and method of enhancing networking and collaboration, more light is shed upon those practices that we often take for granted but which actually help us build stronger communities, integrate services and strengthen the social welfare sector. Malta, it was concluded, needs to aim to tap into this expanding area of interest by formally networking its various priority areas.

2.2 Employment

Employment matters in any consideration of social exclusion because income is both the basis of social participation through consumption and a reflection of the power of people in economic roles. The creation and of jobs and maintenance of an inclusive labour force is necessary to safeguard the present and future of our people, who must be able to find hope and motivation in the prospect of participating in economic and social activity (European Commission, 1994).

The Labour Force in Malta

The most recent labour force survey (January - March 2007) conducted by the Maltese National Statistics Office recorded that out of all persons aged 15 years and over, the number of employed persons reached 153,689 persons (National Statistics Office, 2007) - (see tables overleaf). On the other hand, the total number of unemployed stood at 11,216 persons, whilst a further 162,806 persons were inactive. Whilst the employment rate for males was 74.5 percent, the rate for females stood at 35.5 percent. The Survey showed that the 25-34 age group had the highest employment rate (26.3 percent) followed by the 45-54 age group (25.5 percent). On the other hand, the 55-64 and 65+ age groups had the lowest employment rates (7.1 percent and 0.4 percent) respectively.

Results also indicated that the age category with the largest proportion of workers was the 25 to 34 year group, as much as 26.3 percent of the total employed population. Both the manufacturing and the wholesale and retail trade sector garnered 16.5 percent of the total number of persons in employment. Amongst employed males, 17.9 percent were engaged in the manufacturing sector. The majority of females were estimated to be engaged in the education sector. Self employed persons made up 13.9 percent of the total employed population, whilst 86.1 percent were employees. The number of people in full-time employment amounted to 137,642 persons; out of every 100 full time

employed persons 73 were males and 27 were females. The total number of unemployed persons during January-March 2007 was estimated to be 11,216 persons, which indicated no significant change when compared to 2006 estimates. Hence, out of every 100 persons in the labour force, 6.8 were unemployed. The Survey also denoted how among the total number of unemployed in 2007, 48.8 percent had been looking for a job for over a year whilst a further 38.5 percent had been looking for a job for less than 5 months. The age group with the highest unemployment rate is that between ages 15-24 (40.5 percent).

Table 1 : Labour status (January - March 2007)

	Sex				Total	
Labour Status	Males		Females			
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Employed	104,700	65.2	49,989	29.3	153,689	46.9
Unemployed	7,379	4.6	3,839	2.3	11,216	3.4
Inactive	48,494	30.2	114, 312	68.4	162,806	49.7
Total	160,573	100.0	167,138	100.0	327,711	100.0

Source : National Statistics Office (2007) *Labour Force Survey : January - March 2007*. Malta : National Statistics Office

Table 2 : Age distribution of total employed persons (January - March 2007)

	Sex				Total	
Age group	Males		Females			
	No	%	No	%	No	%
15-24	15,820	15.1	12,237	25.0	28,057	18.2
25-34	24,546	23.4	15,892	32.4	40,438	26.3
35-44	25,442	24.3	9,099	18.6	34,541	22.5
45-54	29,730	28.4	9,425	19.2	39,155	25.5
55-64	8,570	8.2	2,336	4.8	10,906	7.1
65+	592*	0.6	--	--	592*	0.4
Total	104,700	100.0	48,989	100.0	153,689	100.0

* under-represented

Source : National Statistics Office (2007) *Labour Force Survey : January - March 2007*. Malta : National Statistics Office

Table 3 : Unemployed persons classified by age groups (January – March 2007)

	Sex				Total	
Age group	Males		Females			
	No	%	No	%	No	%
15-24	3,212	43.5	1,332	34.7	4,544	40.5
25-34	1,752	23.7	471	12.3	2,223	19.8
35-44	918	12.5	1,102	28.7	2,020	18.0
45-54	1,288	17.5	845	22.0	2,133	19.0
55-64	209*	2.8	87*	2.3	296*	2.7

Total	7,379	100.0	3,837	100.0	11,216	100.0
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* under-represented

Source : National Statistics Office (2007) *Labour Force Survey : January - March 2007*. Malta : National Statistics Office

Employment and Social Policy

In 2004 the government issued a National Action Plan on Employment [NAPemp] (2004) to set out the principal employment strategies for the years 2005 to 2010, as well as the key measures under each strategy for the year 2005. The NAPemp is not a job creation strategy, but aimed to bring about levels of efficiency, skill and inclusion that should allow jobs to be created, and taken up, with greater ease by all. For the government the Napemp constitutes a key document, amongst others, aimed at securing sustainable social and economic development in Malta. The NAPemp was developed by a Core Committee chaired by the Minister responsible for employment. Key stakeholders were consulted as to their perceptions of the key issues surrounding each guideline, and any measures they have taken or planned in this regard.

The NAP emp is structured in three main sections. Section A contains a brief account of the economic context and describes the six strategic elements to be pursued in the years 2005-2010 which reflect Malta's employment policy priorities. These elements include improving the levels of education and certification among the workforce, raising the national employment rate, enhancing the business environment, increasing productivity in the public sector, modernising the public employment service, and improving the governance of labour market policies. In Section B, these six strategies are further broken down as the NAPemp sets out the institutional infrastructure for each guideline, followed by a brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses with respect to each guideline, as well as the measures that are being taken and will be taken within the timeframe of this Plan. Section C contains an account of the governance structure for the Plan, and of the drafting and consultation process that was followed. We read that the Plan provides for a total of eighty one initiatives that will contribute to the development of the Maltese labour market, and which include thirty projects that have been approved for funding under the European Social Fund (ESF) between 2004 and 2006.

The NAPemp emphasises that improving access to employment is seen to be the best way to prevent and to combat social exclusion, and states that Malta subscribes to the European social model by seeking to develop an active welfare state with adequate protection for those who need it. It pledges the government to implement measures that balance work and family life, prevent early school leaving and improve the skills of the unemployed, particularly unqualified youth and the illiterate. Here the NAPemp points out that a number of measures are already underway.

Plans to regulate childcare, and to stimulate its affordable provision, are underway. Certain groups, including widows, single parents and the disabled are able to work without forfeiting social benefits up to a given income ceiling. A number of incentives are in place for employers who recruit older workers or persons from disadvantaged groups. Support to illiterate children and their families is provided by the Ministry of Education. Training, in a variety of trade and non-trade courses, are offered by various public sector entities to persons in and out of work. A number of relatively large projects have been submitted for

consideration under ESF to address the needs of disadvantaged groups, such as literacy training, activation measures for older workers, a supported employment scheme for persons with disability, and childcare provision. Government intends to further address these issues in both the National Action Plans for Employment and for Social Inclusion, and the preparation of both has been co-ordinated.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2004: 8

In 2005 the NAPemp was succeeded by the *National Reform Programme* (Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications & Management Efficiency Unit [Office of the Prime Minister] 2005). Here it was reported that the employment sector in Malta is facing a number of issues. Four issues are especially related to this document's concerns. First, in 2004 Malta's employment gender gap stood at 43.0 percent and the difference in unemployment rates between men and women stood at -3.7 percentage points. When analysing the employment rates between males and females, it can be noted that the 25-54 age group has the highest percentage difference, amounting for more than half the total. Second, with respect to the gender pay gap the percentage difference shrunk from 9.8 percent and 9.1 percent in 2000 and 2001 respectively to 3.6 percent in 2004. Hence, although progress has been made, a difference in pay is still present. Third, occupational segregation continues to be apparent in the public and private sectors as well as in higher education. Most female employees and students can be found in social, health and educational services, and a relatively low proportion in areas such as technology and engineering. Finally, work life policies differ to a great extent between the public and the private sector with the former enjoying greater benefits. In face of such difficulties the National Reform Programme pledged that it is government's intention to raise the overall employment rates, provide employees with the necessary support for transitions in occupational status and to manage appropriately economic migration through the following policy responses. More specifically, the government proposed the following measures:

- Revise the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) youth strategy to address the needs of the youth group that would include generating personalised employment paths for unemployed youths.
- Train and engage mothers absent from the labour market to provide a range of occasional educational services within the community.
- Review tax and pension systems to encourage female participation in the workforce by providing tax credit to women returning to work after an absence of 5 years or more and amending the Income Tax Act to extend the applicability of lower tax on part-time work to spouses working only part-time where their spouse is in full-time employment.
- Promote family-friendly measures by (i) carrying out a feasibility study of teleworking in the local context by ETC, (ii) offering a capped subsidy to parents pursuing ETC training and who require care services, (iii) developing measures and incentives aimed at encouraging teleworking, flexitime and other flexible employment practices, (iv) gender Mainstreaming - the Way Forward, an ESF co-financed project; and (v), regularising and facilitating the provision of childcare facilities.
- Develop a programme whereby all those receiving unemployment benefits will be obliged to attend a mix of training and community services.
- Review policy in the field of employment of third country nationals to minimise illegal employment.

- Set up a Central Visa Unit to better manage visa and work arrangements for third country persons required to address local labour shortages.
- Launch the 'Foster Entrepreneurial Skills' scheme to provide for the necessary stimulus for those unemployed who wish to set up their own business.

2.3 Rationale

In a previous document EAPN Malta (EAPN Malta, 2006) noted that the NAP contains a number of general strengths in that the consultation process was comprehensive and open to all the stakeholders, and that the Social Inclusion Office provided a clear and useful reference point for NGOs to participate in the NAP inclusion. It was also noted that the NAP provides good principles and optimum vision for areas which need to be addressed in the foreseeable future. Positive reception was especially levelled at the sections on children, the strengthening the voluntary sector, networking, and education and illiteracy. Moreover, EAPN Malta welcomed the acknowledgement of the need to focus on providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged persons. However, the same document indicates clearly that EAPN Malta does not consider the NAP as devoid of weaknesses. It noted that whilst some of the target groups and areas identified and agreed upon are not specifically addressed or linked to the action plan for inclusion, the chapter on inclusion can be considered to be more like a vision or a general strategy for policy issues rather than a two year plan for action. Moreover, the document noted that the concerns and recommendations presented by EAPN Malta's various target groups committees and focus groups were not reflected in the draft NAP inclusion. The weaknesses prompted EAPN Malta to put forward a number of recommendations:

- Further participation of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion in planning and formulation of policies aimed to eradicate poverty and exclusion.
- Increasing capacity building of Non Governmental organisations involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion
- Streamlining the NAP's goal to eradicate poverty and social exclusion in all the Government Ministries and Departments.
- The need for the forthcoming National Action Plan for combating poverty and social exclusion 2006-2008 to include specific, realistic and measurable targets tied to a time frame.
- Government is to ensure that the current political focus on employment will result in the development of an inclusive labour market which gives access to quality employment for all who are able to work.
- More investment in education for socially excluded persons and research to make sure that the education system does not serve to the detriment of weaker students.
- Further research investment to monitor poverty and social exclusion in Malta focusing on the quality of life, access to resources and services.
- A drive to monitoring of the NAP inclusion - whereby one studies how the people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are being affected.
- The Maltese Government is to make better use of structural funds to combat poverty and exclusion in Malta as these can be instrumental to address poverty eradication.

It was precisely the second and penultimate recommendations above that provided the inspiration to the planning and carrying out of this research study. It is EAPN's belief that the possibility of

individuals from various subaltern groups to air their views and experiences in specific focus groups is indispensable for optimum levels of actual and potential democratization. Dialogue has the potential and the capability to create active trust through an appreciation of the 'other'. This is especially true in times of increasing individuation and globalization, where individuals as well as groups are forced into new relations in which it is important to work actively for the development of mutual trust and confidence. Indeed, many social relations are sustained by dialogue - a dialogue which does not necessarily involve consensus but which is sustained by common interest. In other words, the presence of social movements and self-help groups is essential to our wish to increase the democratization of Maltese society. The movements and groups open spaces for public dialogue and, as can be seen with the women's movement in past times, can become agenda-setting in society. People are forced into solidarity with each other because active trust, faith in and commitment to the other, combined with mutual responsibility, are necessary aspects of the modern social policy. In this manner EAPN Malta believes that the conducted this research study holds the potential of combating power, seeking to turn the focus group research into negotiated relationships, whether these be between equals or bodies of differential authority.

2.4 Methodology

This section discusses the strategies of data collection/analysis. It is written primarily as an epistemological statement to expose how the results and analysis found in the forthcoming section emerged. In short, it is about 'how we know what we think that we know!'

This EAPN research project was conducted through a number of focus groups with vulnerable sectors of Maltese society who are facing or risking social exclusion by their difficulties in forming part of the formal labour force. A focus group consists of a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research. Whilst it is the researcher who provides the focus of discussion, the data arises from the group interaction amongst participants (Hollander, 2004). Both the character of the focus group *per se* and their participants were self-recruited through 'theoretical' sampling so as to ensure information-rich contributors who have ideas, opinions, and feelings about the topic. Formulated in connection with grounded theory, theoretical sampling is an approach to selecting people on the basis of theoretical rather than statistical grounds :

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory

Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45

The research project co-ordinated the total of nine (9) focus groups, each containing an average of six participants. Focus groups were conducted with female victims of domestic violence, persons with literacy challenges, older persons (60+), third country nationals, persons suffering from mental illness, persons with disabilities, persons with a history of drug addiction, homeless persons, and ex-prisoners.

These target groups were identified on the basis of groups which are recognised as socially excluded within the NAP Inclusion and within general EU documents addressing social inclusion issues. Focus groups were not held with two particular groups:

- Children at risk of poverty. It is acknowledged that children are affected by their parents' or guardians' employment opportunities (or lack of) and income levels. Unfortunately, though, issues of logistics and guardianship consent did not allow the focus group to be held with minors.
- Older unemployed persons (aged between 45 and 60). It was noted that a focus group with this group would have duplicated work already conducted by ETC².

The focus groups were conducted in different localities, according to the convenience of the participants, during July and August 2007.

Focus groups were moderated in a funnel-based manner whilst being attentive to Merton et al.'s (1990) four prerequisites for successful focus groups - namely range, specificity, depth, and personal context. Following the setting of ground rules, each group began with a less structured approach that emphasised free discussion but then moved towards a more structured discussion. The said approach was adopted also in view of the fact that experiences of social exclusion by populations-at-risk such as substance abusers and homeless are extremely personal and sensitive issues, and it is not easy for both moderator and participant to explore them before some level of trust has been established.

The structured part of the discussion focused on three basic issues which constituted the main goals of the research study:

- (i) What are the key challenges faced by socially excluded persons when seeking employment?
- (ii) What are the key challenges faced by socially excluded persons who are outside employment,
- (iii) What are the key challenges faced by socially excluded persons at the place of work?

Data was analysed through 'logical analysis' which reveals the logical shape of informants' ideas by first locating premises within the data that symbolise one group and then exploring connections between one group of premises and another. Moreover, data analysis also consisted in noting both the hidden and overt messages in the 'collaborative narration' between myself and the group, and between the subjects themselves, as well as in the meanings underlying 'argumentative discourse' which offered the unique possibility of understanding how class resources are expressed, constructed and defended by the participants in the focus groups. Of course, the problems surrounding focus groups are well-documented (Bloor et al., 2001). Limitations include limited possibilities for generalisation, undesirable effects resulting from public interaction patterns such as opinionated or reticent members, and over-zealousness on behalf of the moderator which may

² To commemorate the EU Year of Equal Opportunities 2007, a voluntary seminar was organized by the Employment and Training Corporation on the 10th May 2007 for the *Over 40s* unemployed for between 6 to 12 months. The theme discussed was: "*Do we have equal opportunities for the older unemployed in Malta?*" Over 100 persons attended and discussed the said issue, with a final report² documenting the views of the participants. Vide: www.etc.gov.mt

provide cues as what types of responses are desirable. However, this study shared neither the preoccupations of limited potential for generalisation as the arguments related to case study research hold well for focus groups nor critics' belief that interaction may not be well balanced since this challenge can be adequately surmounted through skilled moderating. Moreover, it is unfair to criticise focus group moderators for being over-enthusiasm since this is a problem that can affect most research approaches.

2.5. EAPN Malta's Note about the Results of the Focus Groups

The next four sections of this report (sections 3, 4, 5 and 6) include the experiences of populations-at-risk in entering and engaging in the formal labour force as foretold by the participants in each focus group. EAPN Malta decided to leave their utterances as untreated as possible in order to respect the goal of this research exercise – that is, to listen and give a voice to those who are traditionally voiceless in expert-led seminars and conferences.

Although each focus group datum was checked for accuracy with inexact remark being removed (for example, some participants claimed that there were no childcare centres in Malta when this is not the case, EAPN Malta does not exclude the possibility that there are other examples of misinformation in the next four sections.

However, this should not be deemed as the reflection of misinformed research. On the other hand, such misperceptions provide further challenges to policy-makers:

- Why are these people misinformed about services which were tailored for their needs?
- What is the cause of such misperceptions?
- Where did policy makers get it wrong?
- How is it possible to rectify such a situation in view of ensuring that existing measures are effective and reach out to all?
- etc.

3. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PERSONS WHEN SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

3.1 General Overview

The first topic that the focus group discussions focused on, concerned the difficulties which socially excluded persons face when seeking employment. A number of common factors emanated from the nine focus groups conducted. For example, the **lack of childcare facilities** was mentioned by a number of groups, including victims of domestic violence, homeless mothers and female immigrants. Another common factor concerned the lack of skills training targeted and appropriately structured for specific groups of socially excluded persons, including persons who are victims of domestic violence and living in a home, persons with intellectual disability, and persons who are living in residences or rehabilitation centres.

Age discrimination was another factor which was repeatedly mentioned during the focus groups. Furthermore, discrimination during interviews on the basis of **stigma and stereotypes** was continuously highlighted as a difficulty experienced by most groups, including victims of domestic violence, homeless persons, ex-convicts, ex-drug addicts, and persons suffering from mental illness.

Lack of self-confidence as a result of such discrimination and stigma was also a factor which some groups admitted to and which they believed should be addressed by appropriate empowerment and training measures.

Another important factor which emanated from the focus groups concerned the **deterrent which social benefits place on persons suffering from social exclusion or poverty**. Most groups, including the illiterate, victims of domestic violence, and homeless persons, noted that it makes more sense for them to be registered as unemployed and hence eligible to receiving social benefits, than to go out and work (part-time or full-time) and earn significantly less than what they would receive as benefits.

Most groups also highlighted the problem of **cheap labour**, particularly the manner in which employers generally prefer to engage immigrants who accept relatively low wages, work for longer hours, and in their dire circumstances, are prepared to work without a work-permit. Such abusive trends act as a deterrent for certain groups of socially excluded persons from finding work.

3.2 Victims of Domestic Violence: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.2.1. There is the fear of being harassed or abused by the partner or perpetrator on the way to work or at the workplace itself. (Limited support or protection is provided by the police and lawyers in such circumstances + the national courts take too long to deliberate a judgement, sometimes over ten years);

3.2.2. Women may also have the fear of meeting another man at the place of work (mistrust of men in general). When people know that a person is separated and vulnerable, they try to take advantage;

3.2.3. Employers demonstrate fear of engaging women with a domestic violence record – fear of violence or abuse by the women's partners or perpetrators. Mention was made of discrimination happening on the basis of having a Merhba Bik or another shelter's address. (It should be noted that even when women underwent several training courses at ETC, they remained unemployed);

3.2.4. There is a general lack of care facilities for the women's children - the lack of support to take care of children whilst the mother is at work;

3.2.5. Women experience a degree of discrimination when they disclose that they have children during an interview;

3.2.6. There is a significant lack of flexi-culture locally – for example, limited flexible hours are provided for by employers;

3.2.7. Minimum wage is less than the total of the three types of social benefits which these women are entitled to, as long as they remain unemployed;

3.2.8. There have been occasions where ETC itself has advised woman not to take up a part-time job, but to remain registered, since they would have more income that way;

3.2.9. Many victims of domestic violence suffer from mental health problems as a result of the trauma they have been through. These mental health problems have implications on the extent to which they are able to engage in work relations. They may psychologically not be up to working due to low self-esteem & depression symptoms (experiences were told where women started a job and left after a morning as a result);

3.2.10 There is a lack of awareness among employers about mental health problems as a repercussion of domestic violence (depression; Attention-Deficit Disorder; etc). Experiences told during the focus group also included instances where women lost their job as a result of such lack of such mental health problems. It was also noted that if and when the depression or mental illness is/was mentioned during an interview, they would/were not selected as a result;

3.2.11 Lack of work experience inhibits victims of domestic violence from finding a job – experiences were related where women underwent several training courses at ETC and still remained unemployed;

3.2.12. Age discrimination – when the women are relatively older (aged 45+), they tend to find it very difficult to find a job. An example was also given of a circumstance where a 50 year old woman was sent by ETC to an interview as a post-woman!

3.2.12. Discrimination on the basis of health reasons (Liver failure, trobosis, etc). Participants held that such discrimination is further complimented by the fact that ETC tends to make generalizations within its records. For example, an example was quoted where ETC indicated that a victim of domestic violence had a disability when in affect her condition was that of liver failure. Such misinformation influenced her chances of getting a job;

3.2.13. Some women noted that certain authorities and civil servants who are meant to be providing assistance vis-à-vis employment tend to be illusive and unhelpful.

3.3 Persons with literacy challenges: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.3.1. People need to be able to read and write for most jobs nowadays, including most factory, machine-related and manual jobs;

3.3.2. Persons with literacy challenges tend to have limited work experience due to their long-term unemployment;

3.3.3. Registered unemployed persons who are illiterate encounter problems even when ETC refers them to specific employers. Participants explained that referrals for possible job openings are not always genuine since employers, once contacted, inform them that there was no existing job vacancy at that point in time;

3.3.4. Jobs which traditionally have been held by persons with literacy challenges (usually of a manual nature) are now being assumed by immigrants at very low wages. Participants within the focus groups held that employers prefer to engage immigrants since they are prepared to work at rates below the minimum wage;

3.3.5. It makes more sense for a person who is illiterate to remain registered as unemployed and receive social benefits, rather than to work for a wage which is lower than the actual social benefits which that person is receiving;

3.3.6. Persons with literacy challenges are dependent on others to identify job openings or vacancies advertised in news papers or on notice boards. Participants explained that they also encounter discriminatory attitudes within public bodies (ETC) where front-desk officers refuse or fail to provide assistance with reading out what is written on notice boards;

3.3.7. Note was also made of discrimination taking place on the basis of political alliances when assisting persons with literacy challenges in finding employment;

3.3.8. Participants, currently registered as unemployed, explained that there were cases where they were obliged by the authorities to attend the same courses (eg. gardening) three times over and that they were provided with a certificate every time although having not done much within the actual courses;

3.3.9. Participants also explained that persons who are registered and who are nearly sixty years old (close to retirement) are still required to attend literacy courses (Maltese), even if they do not wish to do so;

3.3.10. Participants claimed that the authorities require them to attend computer courses, even though they are illiterate.

3.4 Older Persons (60+): Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.4.1. When talking about older workers, EU and national policies tend to be geared towards persons who are aged 50+. However, they do not cater for persons aged 60+, even though these persons may wish to work or be active. 'Equal opportunities for all' policies should cater for elderly persons too.

3.4.2. Elderly persons tend not to form part of trade unions after retirement age. Therefore, they experience difficulties in identifying who to resort to whenever an injustice is done. Trade unions do not focus on concerns of persons who are 60+, or on what happens after the statutory retirement age, despite there being a solid link between employment and pensions.

3.4.3. As a person approaches retirement age, he/she tends to experience a significant degree of age discrimination in as far as promotions and training-on-the-job is concerned. In turn, there is an increasing tendency for companies to encourage early retirement – especially for persons involved in manual work;

3.4.4. There is very little awareness or provision for appropriate work for elderly persons (60+), even though they are still capable of working;

3.4.5. Participants held that many employers do not wish to employ elderly persons;

3.4.6. There are few if any structures which allow for the engagement of elderly persons for paid or voluntary work – even on a casual basis;

3.4.7. There is a significant degree of discrimination against elderly persons in assigning part-time jobs. The employment of young people and of migrants who are ready to be engaged at very low wages (even below minimum wage) may indirectly be detrimental to the potential of elderly persons finding part-time jobs. This is because employers assume wrongly that only younger workers are strong, healthy and ready to work.

3.5 Third-Country Nationals (TCNs): Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.5.1. The fact that third country nationals have cultures and backgrounds which are different to those which are Maltese, makes Maltese employers hesitant to engage foreigners;

3.5.2. A significant amount of prejudice among Maltese vis-à-vis third country nationals.

3.5.3. TCNs from particular countries are perceived as stupid and foolish persons (even though they might actually be qualified or professionals). On the other hand, Maltese look up to TCNs from developed or European countries. *'Is it a sin of ours that we are nationals of a developing or a third world country?'*

3.5.4. Racist stereotypes and generalized negative reputations of TCNs with certain nationalities (Arabic);

3.5.5. Discrimination - Employers show explicit and or implicit preference towards employing Maltese persons – giving no or limited chance to TCNs to prove themselves and their skills; *'What is the difference between a Maltese engineer and a foreign engineer? Both have the qualifications.'* *'What is the difference between a Maltese plasterer and a foreign plasterer? Why does the latter get paid much less for the same work?'* A nurse by profession explained that he was given only a one-day trial in a Maltese hospital to prove his skill!!! *'Why?'*, he asks, *'because of my colour?!'*

3.5.6. Language barrier – it is difficult for TCNs who do not know how to speak Maltese or English to find a job;

3.5.7. TCNs often get offered low wages when offered a job – lower than what Maltese could earn on the same job, and sometimes lower than the minimum wage (participants quoted a case where a TCN is earning Lm 150 per month for a 40-hour week);

3.5.8. TCNs often get offered unskilled or inferior jobs – which are also outside of their field of expertise or qualifications (for example a qualified nurse by profession ended up being engaged as a tile-layer);

3.5.9. TCNs are employed to fill in the gaps of the labour market – jobs which Maltese themselves are not prepared to undertake – and they are often expected to do more than a Maltese would do in less time and for less pay.

3.5.10. TCNs generally need to be more qualified than the average Maltese to do what one wishes to do;

3.5.11. There are also issues of having one's qualifications recognized by the national educational and professional authorities;

3.5.12. Many TCNs in Malta who are working as professionals tend to do so as self-employed, due to the difficulties they otherwise encounter in seeking employment.

3.5.13. Sometimes it is the authorities themselves which pose difficulties to TCNs to find employment, despite there being an employer who is ready to engage a person and despite having the required qualifications for a post requiring specific skills/qualifications;

3.5.14. TCNs who are refugees (or afforded temporary protection or with rejected status) face increased difficulties when looking for a job (very low wages; 40+ hour weeks without over-time payment; etc). The general attitude of employers tends to be condescending and/or be charity-driven - *'Whatever we give you as a job, be grateful for it'*.

3.5.15. Employers know that TCNs who are refugees (or temporary protection or rejected status) have very limited possibilities of recourse or work-related rights enforcement through existing authorities. Which authority can a refugee or a TCN with temporary protection revert to in view of placing a complaint about the conditions of work? How will such a complaint affect their status or work permit in Malta?

3.5.16. As a result, TCNs who are looking for a job or who are offered jobs with inferior conditions tend to feel exploited, and a sense of rejection;

3.5.17. For most immigrant women with children, it is difficult to go out to work, especially since there is a lack of childcare facilities at their disposal. Some women explained that there are circumstances where the nuns at the residences offer to keep the children whilst there are at work;

3.5.18. There are very limited opportunities for women TCNs to find work in Malta. The type of work offered to them is seasonal and laborious (cleaning in hotels).

3.5.19. Women TCNs also find it difficult to enter employment due to language barriers and the lack of training opportunities which they have whilst living residences in Malta. Some women TCNs cannot afford to travel to ETC.

3.6 Persons with a Mental Illness: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.6.1. An obstacle to finding work for persons suffering from a mental illness is the illness itself. One has to fight it and its effects to be able to carry on with life and go out and work;

3.6.2. Generally, many persons who would have just left a psychiatric hospital suffer from a certain degree of lack of confidence and self esteem. These could also be symptoms of the mental illness which the person suffers from;

3.6.3. There is a generally stigma about Mount Carmel and psychiatric hospitals in Malta, whereby patients are perceived as not being able to work or be in a social relationship. Persons suffering from a mental illness are aware of this stigma and therefore need to constantly fight their perception of what others might think of them and of their sense of society-inflicted disgrace, before being able to build up the required self-confidence to seek work;

3.6.4 Participants all agreed that persons suffering from a mental illness do not experience any discrimination during interviews as long as they do not disclose the fact that they suffer from a mental illness or that they spent some time in a psychiatric hospital, to their potential employer/s. (One particular participant noted that this is also the case with being socially included and accepted. She has not informed her boyfriend's family that she spent some time at Mount Carmel for fear of not being accepted by them). While there is generally little fear of returning home and to a 'normal life' after spending some time in a rehabilitation facility or a hospital, persons suffering from a mental illness tend to hide the same illness from third parties – especially since they fear it might jeopardize their opportunities for inclusion;

3.6.5 Persons suffering from a mental illness may encounter problems to find a job if they are also illiterate or have a limited degree of education;

3.6.6 Participants noted that many-a-time companies and/or potential employers do not give any feedback or acknowledgement of applications, or following interviews.

3.7 Persons with a Disability: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.7.1 Persons with a form of disability tend to have a fear of social exclusion due to that disability. There is a tendency to blame the disability for not getting a job or not managing to do something. For this reason, many persons with a disability tend not to give their very best during interviews since they are psychologically pre-conditioned by their disability;

3.7.2 This symptom may also be the result of parental over-protectiveness during a person's upbringing due to his/her disability. It may also be due to the failure of the education system in building the self-esteem of the child. Schools need to be informed about disabilities and need to know how to teach children to deal with bullying and social integration. They also need to ensure that facilitators themselves do not mal-treat children with disabilities (participants actually quoted cases);

3.7.3 Neither government nor the private sector is observing the legal obligation by law to have at least 2% of its workforce composed of persons with a disability (Persons with Disability (Employment) (Standard Percentage) Order, 1995 (L.N. 157 of 1995);

3.7.4 ETC treats all persons with disabilities in the same manner – making no distinction between mentally disabled and physically disabled persons. There is no specialized assistance provided to persons with an intellectual disability to find employment. Persons with a mental disability are treated in the same manner as physically disabled are. This means that they end up at the bottom of the list to find employment. A participant explained that her daughter who has an intellectual disability has been registered with ETC for four years and that she has never been called up for an interview – although she has attended some courses;

3.7.5 There are no opportunities for persons with intellectual disability to continue their education after the age of 16 years except for a pilot transition programme being implemented with a very small number of adults who have Down Syndrome. This programme is the result of a good collaboration between the Down Syndrome Association and the Eden Foundation;

3.7.6 Persons who suffer from epilepsy do not mention anything about their disability during interviews, for fear that they will not be chosen. Furthermore, ETC itself sometimes refrains from informing potential employers about such disabilities in view of ascertaining employment opportunities for these persons;

3.7.7 Persons with multi-disabilities face tremendous difficulty in terms of entering education or employment. Multiple disabilities do not have the proper educational provisions. This is mostly due to lack of proper professional training of teachers and assistants. Those who attend special schools can receive education until the age of nineteen, while those attending mainstream schools can receive an education until the age of 16. Life long learning for this group of persons essentially does not exist. Furthermore, on reaching school-leaving age, these persons generally move to day centres where members of staff have little knowledge of continuing the programmes they had at school - thus the chances of employment remain grim.

3.7.8 Persons with disabilities face two forms of barriers to access to employment:

- a) Physical – many places of work do not facilitate access for persons in wheelchairs into and around the office/premises, nor do they provide required/specific technological assistance (eg. computers for visually impaired persons). Furthermore, transport service arrangements to/from work are limited;
- b) Psychological – persons with disabilities (especially visible ones) face negative attitudes even during interviews, with inappropriate questions and comments being made;

3.7.9 There is a general lack of training for persons with disabilities, especially for persons who are visually impaired. Orientation and mobility are extremely important elements for persons who are visually impaired. Especially in the case of visually impaired persons, lack of orientation and mobility training signifies a significant degree of social

exclusion, since they refrain from moving around, going out, working, etc. The lack of mobility and orientation training for visually impaired persons therefore implies discrimination against this group of persons who do not have the same chances as other people to integrate and participate in society.

3.8 Persons with a History of Substance Abuse: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.8.1 Most employers request to have a police conduct certificate. Once a person's conduct is tarnished, it is extremely difficult to find a job;

3.8.2 One's reputation also makes it very difficult to find a job. Persons who were once substance abusers remain stigmatized;

3.8.3 Employers are scared to employ a person with a history of substance abuse – they prefer to employ someone without such a history;

3.8.4 If one does not go through a rehabilitation programme, it is even more difficult to find a job;

3.8.5 Furthermore, if one has been in prison for some time, it is also extremely difficult to find a job. The stigma given to that person is significant, and discrimination on this basis, even during interviews, is explicit and openly admitted;

3.8.6 A person who has gone through a rehabilitation programme finds it difficult to re-integrate back into society – especially due to the social pressures which that person faces, as well as pressure to find housing, etc...to start from scratch. Furthermore, there is the recognition that it is easy to go astray and be sent back to prison;

3.8.7 Skills training is lacking in prison and limited in rehabilitation centres;

3.8.8 Age discrimination is also an issue – the older one is, the more difficult it is to find a job. Let alone if that it matched with a tarnished police conduct!

3.8.9 There is lack of appropriate work for persons over forty years of age;

3.8.10 There is also a degree of self-imposed fear – of not being received or being welcome at the place of work;

3.8.11 A significant degree of nepotism – even at ETC – only if you know someone you can get a job. *“Ghalhekk, ftiit nemmen fl-ETC!”*

3.8.12 There are too many people who are ready to work without a proper work permit, and too many employers who prefer to employ someone without a work permit (eg immigrants are preferred to Maltese for this reason)

3.9 Homeless Persons: Difficulties Encountered when Seeking Employment

3.9.1. There is a general lack of support to take care of children whilst a poor or homeless person is at work. It should be noted that one is not meant to leave his/her children unattended at homeless shelters;

3.9.2 A participant described his case as a father with a child, but no housing and no job. *‘Il-gvern ma’ jimpurtahx mill- ‘homeless’*;

3.9.3 Employers are scared to employ persons who mention that they are at a residence or shelter (eg. Fejda Residential Facility) Some ETC members of staff are not even aware of these shelters or residences;

3.9.4 Participants have the impression that immigrants are treated better than homeless persons by the Maltese in general. They explained that employers prefer to engage immigrants since they are prepared to work without a permit, at relatively low wages and for longer hours. The employer knows he/she can abuse of the immigrant.

3.10 Ex-Convicts: Difficulties Encountered by when Seeking Employment

3.10.1 Ex-convicts tend to have a general fear of what others will think of them - *'Why are people looking at me like that?' Is it because they remember me with hand-cuffs in court? Did they recognize my name as a criminal?* They have a negative perception of what others think of them - *if something happens on the place of work, they will immediately blame me because of my criminal reputation.* For this reason, many ex-convicts tend to be very reserved during interviews, keeping certain information about their past aback.

3.10.2 Whenever potential employers ask for a CV, ex-convicts might prefer not to apply or go for an interview since they 'know' / presume that once their police conduct certificate is disclosed, they will not be employed. It should be noted that for persons who had a prison sentence of less than three years, his/her police conduct certificate takes three years to clear from the moment they leave prison. For persons who had a prison sentence of more than three years, it takes five years from leaving prison for their police conduct certificate to be cleared. Participants therefore claimed that the system does not provide any recognition of how well a person has behaved whilst serving his prison sentence, despite the fact that prison is meant to be primarily a 'rehabilitation' or 'correctional' facility.

3.10.4 There is also the fear of being a target of partisan gossip and journalism – particularly given Malta's small size and the fact that everyone knows everybody.

3.10.5 Participants held that one is labelled as a convict for life. For this reason, it is better to leave Malta and start afresh where nobody knows the person;

3.10.6 Participants claimed that 'prison is there to *make* criminals' due to the vicious circle the system creates (short sentence – out on bail – suspected and imprisoned again). This general reputation of criminals and ex-convicts does not help them in terms of finding a job.

4. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY SOCIALLY EXCLUDED WHEN OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

4.1 General Overview

The second topic that the focus groups discussed concerned the difficulties which socially excluded persons face when outside employment.

Common factors mentioned within the focus groups included the following as a result of being unemployed: **a sense of desperation and frustration**; boredom; **lack of self-esteem**; **apathy and demotivation**; **uselessness**; **depression and anxiety**; and a general sense of not knowing where to start from.

The problem of **stereotypes and being labelled** as lazy/dependent was mentioned by certain focus groups (victims of domestic violence, with persons with literacy challenges and with persons with a history in substance abuse).

Participants in most focus groups described the **material implications** of being unemployed – including not affording basic necessities such as housing and transport costs. The focus group with homeless detailed these material implications even further (Not enough money to even go for interviews or to buy medicine, cigarettes, shavers or sanitary towels).

Most participants within the focus groups mentioned that the difficulty they encounter in trying to get by and cater for everyday needs on the basis of **social benefits** alone. Many stated that these do not suffice.

4.2 Victims of Domestic Violence: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.2.1 Victims of domestic violence who cannot find a job and earn a living experience an increased sense of loneliness, as well as of lack of self-esteem and self-worth (imagining the world is against them);

4.2.2 Unemployment and lack of income becomes an additional problem to cope with – multiplying the issues which one has to deal with when having been victim to domestic violence;

4.2.3 Social Benefits and relief are not enough to get by, especially when a woman has children to cater for. For this reason, some women work informally, since they claim they would earn much less if they declare their little income and that they would also lose their right to social benefits;

4.2.4 Sometimes, women who have left the shelter and who are unemployed, have no one to rely on or refer to. For this reason, some women may seek to get involved with a man who is well-off in view of sustaining her children and living expenses;

4.2.5 Being labelled as lazy, incompetent, etc. by family members and by society in general. Many-a-time, women and children are labelled as a 'Merhba Bik' woman /children. There are also cases where children are bullied or mocked at school even due to inappropriate remarks passed by teachers in front of school mates;

4.2.6 Difficulties to cope with litigation and legal fees. (Experiences told where also state lawyers have charged the women fees);

4.2.7 Difficulties to pay for transport – especially for interviews and for errands;

4.2.8 Difficulties in securing housing.

4.3 Persons with literacy challenges: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

- 4.3.1 Highly dependent on others (correspondence; finances; etc);
- 4.3.2 Boredom – never-ending days;
- 4.3.3 A sense of frustration and failure due to being refused at interviews;
- 4.3.4 Feeling a general sense of disorientation (not knowing where to start from);
- 4.3.5 Depression and anxiety;
- 4.3.6 Family problems as a result of persons remaining unemployed for a long time (possibly leading to break-ups);
- 4.3.7 Unable to pay pending invoices / indebtedness;
- 4.3.8 Resort to theft so as to be able to cover expenses;
- 4.3.9 Resort to substance abuse;
- 4.3.10 Subject to stereotypes (lazy, bums, etc)

4.4 Older Persons (60+): Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.4.1 Some elderly persons look forward to retirement, especially those engaged in manual work for most of their life. Others do not look forward to retirement, since they wish to remain active and to be involved;

4.4.2 Those who are unsuccessful in finding work tend to feel socially excluded and useless - '*M'inti tajjeb ghal xejn!*' They feel as though there is little to go out for or get involved in;

4.4.3 This at times may lead to depression, boredom and apathy.

4.5 Third-Country Nationals (TCNs): Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.5.1 The Maltese job market is highly controlled – TCNs are perceived as persons who should not be allowed to establish themselves in Malta that easily, taking the jobs of Maltese persons. They are perceived as a threat to the Maltese worker in terms of job opportunities. (This is related to the fact that Malta is small, and therefore it provides limited opportunities – especially for semi-skilled and professional work).

4.5.2. The Maltese job market is based too much on presentation of certificates and qualifications. It is not flexible enough, especially with TCNs, to allow one's experience to serve as proof of skill and knowledge. *'Paper is given more importance than what one is capable of doing'.*

4.5.3. Experience on the job is important. However, TCNs are not given enough time or space for adaptability by potential employers – they are not given a chance to prove themselves on the job. *'You must fit into the Maltese system and way of doing things right away – otherwise you do not get a job'.*

4.5.4 TCNs who cannot find work feel a sense of desperation; eventually, they tend to become willing to do anything to enter the job market – even if not applying their skills or if working in inferior conditions;

4.5.5 Most job offers are without a work permit. If a TCN asks the employer to get a work permit for him/her, he/she risks not getting the job;

4.5.6 TCNs who cannot find a job experience problems with accommodation, subsistence and transportation costs. The Marsa Open Centre is only for persons who are refugees, have temporary protection or humanitarian status, etc, and is limited in terms of space and duration of stay. The subsistence allowance for persons with humanitarian status and for those with reject status is minimal and does not suffice to even cover rent, even if TCNs resort to share their accommodation with other tenants.

4.5.7 Women TCNs (humanitarian or reject status) with children find it very hard to get by with the subsistence allowance provided;

4.5.8 Education opportunities are also very limited for TCNs who are seeking to attend training to improve their employability and their chances of finding a job.

4.5.9 Sometimes, therefore, unemployed TCNs tend to loiter and spend time looking or waiting for an odd job here and there – sitting down on street walls in Marsa, Mtarfa, etc. There are times when they may even get involved in crime to earn or retrieve some money.

4.5.10 Unemployed TCNs also experience difficulty in integrating in society – they feel isolated, and due to prejudice and discrimination shown towards them, they feel excluded. In turn, they realize that society tags them as lazy and as a problem. As a result, there are also psychological and emotional repercussions – particularly since TCNs many-a-time do not even have a family to fall back on.

4.5.11 As a result, sometimes there is resort to alcoholism, addictions, pimping, and involvement in illicit relationships. These all tend to develop into significant social problems, having implications on the country as a whole. *'We do not want to create a problem for the country – however the general situation tends to lead to that'*

4.6 Persons with a Mental Illness: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.6.1 As a result of being unemployed and not being able to find work, many persons might feel demotivated and discouraged, as well as a sense of low self-esteem. They feel a sense of emptiness and anxiety, blaming the sickness as the main reason for not being able to find work;

4.6.2 Other persons might have become mentally ill as a result of a job they had in the past, and the manner in which they were treated before by co-workers or employers. This may influence their present state of mind – instigating a sense of apathy and laziness towards the world of work as a whole. For this reason, it might be necessary for a person to seek a job which is completely different to that which he/she did before his/her illness;

4.6.3 The nature of the type of work which persons who have just left a psychiatric home may need to seek might have to differ from their previous skills or original qualifications, especially if they have spent a long time in convalescence. (For example, they would be more likely to find manual or unskilled work);

4.6.4 Unemployed persons suffering from mental illness encounter difficulties to get by since the social benefit provided to them is not enough to cater for everyday needs and for proper social inclusion;

4.6.5 When persons are laid off due to their illness and the manner in which it is affecting their work, it can lead to increased depression.

4.7 Persons with Disabilities: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.7.1 Persons with disabilities who are unemployed experience a significant degree of frustration and eventual psychological apathy. Furthermore, their dependency on others is reinforced;

4.7.2 Persons who lose their job as a result of an inflicted or sudden disability feel extremely useless - as though it is the end of the world – and their self-esteem suffers significantly. Furthermore, they experience a sudden change in income (shifting from a constant salary to the disability pension / boarded out). Therefore, their way of life and standard of living changes completely;

4.7.3 It is very difficult to get by without paid income. This is also because the disability pension is minimal (lower than the minimum wage). One cannot live independently with just the pension;

4.7.4 Furthermore, it should be noted that an unemployed person who is disabled, and who is married to a person who is earning more than Lm 55 weekly, is not entitled to receive the disability pension.

4.8 Persons with a History of Substance Abuse: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.8.1 Exasperation in having to always show one's police conduct certificate to potential employers and being refused on that basis;

4.8.2 Forced to attend ETC courses – why, if a person does not like the particular course which ETC is requesting him/her to attend?

4.9 Homeless Persons: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.9.1 No money and little, if at all, to get by with;

4.9.2 Not enough money to even go for interviews, or to buy medicine, cigarettes, shavers or sanitary towels;

4.9.3 Adolescents, aged between 16 and 18, have no right to receive social benefits, even though registered with ETC. Appogg provides these persons with a daily subsistence of Lm 2. However, this subsistence is sent a month or two late. (In fact, those that are at YMCA have their subsistence paid by YMCA itself until the monies from Appogg are received – otherwise it would be very difficult for these persons to be able to get by);

4.9.4 In the case of adolescents, Appogg social workers do not even visit the shelter that often. They are the ones who are meant to be assisting in providing basic necessities (such as sanitary towels). They also fail to realize that adolescents at the shelter do not have the means to go out;

4.9.5 Some homeless persons are embarrassed to admit or mention that they actually homeless – they therefore avoid begging at all costs;

4.9.6 Limited chance to speak about one's difficulties with authorities (*'Trid tkun taf lil xi hadd biex jaghtu kasek'*);

4.9.7 The government hardly assists YMCA homeless to cover expenses – let alone how much it will help individual persons who are homeless to find employment! The general attitude is *'Dawk homeless, dawk 'seconds!'*

4.9.8 Persons who are listed on Part II of the Employment Register at ETC cannot benefit from unemployment benefits for six months, and then need to wait another few weeks after that to start receiving the full unemployment benefit. This affects a person who is homeless very badly. A participant explained that he actually became homeless because he was placed on Part II of the Employment Register and after a few months did not have enough income to get by, ending up on the streets. He explained that although he told his story to ETC and to the labour office, he was told that there were no exceptions to the rule, despite a person being homeless;

4.9.10 It pays a homeless person to remain registered as unemployed for a while – thus being able to save up a little and get back on one's feet to be able to look for a full time job (it does not even pay to work part-time since one is likely to earn less than what one gets through unemployment benefits. Furthermore, part-time work means no leave, no sick-leave entitlements, and generally less pay for more hours). Most participants confirmed that they have worked without a work permit because of the system as it is and also because they would lose their right to relief as soon as they declare employment.

4.10 Ex-Convicts: Difficulties Encountered when Outside Employment

4.10.1 Many people who leave prison have no family or friends to fall on or live with;

4.10.2 No income – implying difficulties regarding housing, food and other everyday necessities;

4.10.3 The fact that an ex-convict does not manage to have housing implies that he might end up without a home address which he can give to the authorities for bail purposes. This means that he can end up back in jail until he manages to have such a home address available (abroad there are parole houses specifically aimed at providing ex-convicts with a roof over their heads and to be able to provide an address for bail purposes);

4.10.4 Survival becomes the name of the game. *‘Tispicca terga tisraq u taghme!’*

5. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PERSONS WHEN HOLDING PART- OR FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

5.1 General Overview

Focus groups discussed the difficulties and problems which socially excluded persons encounter at the place of work (part-time or full-time).

A factor which was recurrently mentioned throughout the focus group sessions concerned **stereotypical attitudes**, mockery and/or gossip by co-workers.

Abusive and discriminatory actions (or omissions) were also mentioned in most focus groups. Such discriminatory and abusive actions were mostly highlighted by participants in the focus groups with victims of domestic violence, with third country nationals, with persons with literacy challenges, and with persons with a history of substance abuse.

These actions included **low wages** (equal to or below minimal wage), **frequent job offers which are conditional to the absence of a work permit**, and **lack of un-discriminatory opportunities for promotions on the job**. Participants in certain focus groups (persons with a disability and persons suffering from mental illness) also quoted cases where employers and/or superiors intentionally acted to make the persons resign or leave his job due to their 'condition'.

Another issue which participants in various focus groups spoke about related to the **lack of awareness and sensitivity** which some employers and/or superiors show towards socially excluded persons' situation. Various focus groups also highlighted the **absence of a flexi-culture** by employers and/superiors.

5.2. Victims of Domestic Violence: Difficulties Encountered when Holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.2.1 Victims of domestic violence sometimes also become victims of labelling, stigma & stereotypical attitudes at the place of work. They tend to be perceived as 'victims' and not as 'survivors';

5.2.2 One feels like people at work are aware of everything one does (*'Ghassa tieghek'*);

5.2.3 Lack of awareness and/or understanding about the repercussions of domestic violence and how it can affect the person at the place of work;

5.2.4 Intentional and unintentional abusive behaviour by co-workers which can affect (psychologically) the person who has experienced domestic violence. Such behaviour can include unnecessary swearing, vulgar language, etc;

5.2.5 Most employment conditions/ employers/ supervisors do not allow for sufficient flexi-time – even though a person's health conditions may require otherwise;

5.2.6 There is a general lack of psychological and/or counselling services at places of work;

5.2.7 Very low and abusive wages. One participant highlighted that she was being paid Lm 1 per hour;

5.2.8 Participants related instances when opportunities of promotions at the place of work were purposely not disclosed by superiors to them;

5.2.9 Difficulty in getting to and returning from work due to lack of private transport means (or lack of enough money to pay for such transport).

5.3 Persons with literacy challenges: Difficulties Encountered when holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.3.1 Some persons with literacy challenges tend to be subject to stereotypical attitudes whereby they are mocked and made fun of at the place of work;

5.3.2 Abuse – participants explained that there have been many cases where employers, managers or superiors asked persons with literacy challenges to sign compromising documents while lying about the actual content and purpose of the said documents. There have also been cases where the content (even of employment contracts) is not read out to them, and where neither is a copy of the document provided to them beforehand so as to get a relative or a friend to consult it on their behalf;

5.3.3 Persons with literacy challenges have little chance of being promoted on the job.

5.4 Older Persons (+60): Difficulties Encountered when Holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.4.1 As a person reaches retirement age, he/she tends to experience a significant degree of age discrimination in as far as promotions and training-on-the-job is concerned.

5.4.2 There is an increasing tendency for companies to encourage early retirement – especially for persons involved in manual work;

5.4.3 As a result, many elderly persons tend to feel as though they are no more needed; they are made to feel useless - 'M'inti tajjeb għal xejn!'

5.5 Third Country Nationals: Difficulties Encountered when Holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.5.1 TCNs are often expected by employers to do more than a Maltese would do on the same job – and to do it in less time and for less pay. A recurrent employer attitude is that of seeking how to get as much as possible done by the TCN for the least cost possible;

5.5.2 Many-a-time, TCNs are not provided with an employment contract or an agreement. This is because they are expected to do what no one else in a company or factory is willing to do. Therefore, no employment contract can be drawn up due to an undetermined job description, and no work permit is sought or issued;

5.5.3 For this reason, TCNs without a contract are not always provided with normal conditions of work. For example, no or very limited leave is provided by employers to TCNs. Others are asked to work over-time and long hours without due or appropriate compensation (sometimes also leading to accidents on the job due to over-exhaustion);

5.5.4 Most employers are not willing to get a work permit for TCNs. They prefer to engage a person without a work permit and pay low wages (even at Lm 1.25 per hour);

5.5.6 When a work permit has been attained, many-a-time it is used by the employer as a means of control, intimidation and exploitation over the TCN:

- a) If a TCN is fired, employers tend to make sure that he/she does not get another job in Malta - 'I will get you out of this country!'
- b) If a TCN resigns from his job, his visa is not renewed following termination of employment (unless he finds another job before his visa expires);

5.5.7 Participants quoted a case where an employer of Indian engineers is forcing them to live in a particular guest house offering substandard accommodation (four persons in one room) – threatening to send the engineers back to India if they leave the guest house and seek alternate accommodation. The employer is in possession of the engineers' passports.

5.5.8 No office / authority where TCNs can file complaints about breaches of their employment rights and have redress effected;

5.5.9 Existing trade unions generally target only Maltese members. Furthermore, TCNs do not join trade unions because of fear of losing their job. Therefore, as such, TCNs in Malta do not have a representative body which they can voluntarily and feasibly become members of in view of having their rights collectively protected and represented at the various industrial, national and policy levels. As a result, inferior conditions of work for TCNs continue to persevere;

5.5.10 Bureaucratic renewal procedures are encountered by employers who wish to carry on employing a TCN and hence have their work permit extended. The renewal procedures in themselves are highly discouraging and frustrating for employers.

5.6 Persons suffering from Mental Illness: Difficulties Encountered when holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.6.1 There are situations where persons get laid off as a result of the lack of commitment, incoherence or apathy which they demonstrate at the place of work due to their sickness;

5.6.2 Persons suffering from mental illness may suffer from fatigue due to medication they are taking. This may affect their work and concentration;

5.6.3 Sometimes, persons who would have just come out of a psychiatric hospital and who would have just started working might feel that they are working for nothing and no one – especially until they settle back into society;

5.6.4 Certain employers expect persons to 'know' they are not capable of working – especially if they suffer from a mental illness which has implications on their concentration and/or work. There is therefore little sensitivity shown towards these persons, as well as lack of understanding;

5.6.5 A participant also quoted an instance where an employer/ superior was out-right discriminatory and vindictive towards the person suffering from mental illness – driving her towards 'insanity'.

5.6.6 Many-a-time, persons suffering from a mental illness are requested to carry out repetitive clerical or manual work. This leads to boredom, dissatisfaction and a sense of wishing to leave work;

5.6.7 Some employers and employees treat these persons as small children, perceiving them as having limited intelligence and knowledge. Sometimes, such treatment consists of positive discrimination – however, this does not always help the individual to integrate with colleagues, etc. Participants quoted instances when persons suffering from mental illness are mocked and made fun of (explicitly or implicitly). *'Apposta jaghmluli!! lwaqqawk down!'*

5.7 Persons with Disabilities: Difficulties Encountered when holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.7.1 Although there is policy within the government's civil service to employ persons with a disability, there remains to a certain degree the perception that such persons can only do so much and that job promotions are therefore not possible. One participant of the focus group noted that she was not going to be provided with a promotion which was well deserved and for which she had passed the requisite examinations, due to the disability she had. Furthermore, her capability of actually sitting for an examination had actually been questioned;

5.7.2 Abuse and exploitation - sometimes, persons suffering conditions such as epilepsy are not awarded job promotions or wage raises since employers know that such persons cannot easily resign and find another job;

5.7.3 There are instances when employers do things purposely to drive the person to resign;

5.7.4 Blind persons, even if using computers for visually impaired persons, experience difficulty during work especially when documents are only provided in Maltese. The absence of a Maltese language synthesizer is a severe limitation both for people in or seeking work. Even when the visually impaired person comes equipped with screen reading software and is trained to use it, he/she is still not able to do a lot of the work since most of the documents are in Maltese. Synthesizers are available in a vast number of languages and the absence of one in Maltese prevents visually impaired persons from competing for jobs for which they are otherwise fully qualified.

5.7.5 Employers are not sure how to react with persons who become suddenly disabled due to an accident. Some employees end up losing their job, especially if it is deemed that the nature of the job may be of danger to others or to the employee as a result of the disability. Sometimes, employers are not ready to re-train the person in view of remaining with the company. On the other hand, there are other employers who are very sensitive to the circumstances of the person experiencing the accident, and who seek to provide the required leave, training and adaptability in view of retaining the person as an employee. One of the participants explained that this fortunately happened to him and that the end result was that both the employer and the employee gained out of the patience and investment made in keeping that person on board.

5.8 Persons with a History of Substance Abuse: Difficulties Encountered when Holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.8.1 Once an employee who had a drug problem shows his police conduct to his employer, he is likely to be fired;

5.8.2 Employers tend to engage persons with a history in drug addiction (or substance abuse) on a part-time basis - at least on paper. In this manner, they are not obliged to provide bonuses or leave to the employee – knowing pretty well that an ex-convict is highly unlikely to make any reports to the authorities or take the employer up to court, due to his previous criminal record;

5.8.3 Furthermore, there are some employers that ensure to engage a person without a work permit since they are aware of the criminal case and court proceedings that person is going through;

5.8.4 Therefore, there is also a significant degree of abuse in regard to persons with a history of substance abuse.

5.9 Homeless Persons: Difficulties Encountered when Holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.9.1 Stigma and gossip about the person's situation (unnecessary comments);

5.9.2 Lack of sensitivity by employers. An example which was given included a homeless person being fired due to regular court sittings forming part of separation and custody procedures, despite having informed the employer about his situation prior to being employed;

5.9.3 Lack of social responsibility – when employers show a degree of understanding or flexibility due to the homeless person's social problems, some still seek to abuse of that person's situation, procrastinating payment of his/her wage, or actually paying a lower wage (perhaps even undeclared).

5.10 Ex-Convicts: Difficulties Encountered when holding Full- or Part-time Employment

5.10.1 There are some employers who, despite accepting to employ an ex-convict, would then feel as though they are rendering a favour to the person and can therefore abuse of his/her situation (eg. minimum wage; forced overtime, etc);

5.10.2 Given that most ex-convicts prefer not to give an account of their past to their employers or colleagues, there is always the fear that a client or a colleague recognizes the person as an ex-criminal. The participants gave an example of a friend of theirs who, by mistake, called a client of his 'sir', since he happened to be a prison guard he knew whilst serving his prison sentence, and who was then fired on the spot as a result.

5.10.3 At present, the system allows persons serving more than a two-year sentence to go out to work during the last three months of their sentence. Nevertheless, the convicts need to identify the work placement themselves and their employer has to pick them up and take them back to prison. These conditions cause problems for the convicts in actually being able to find work opportunities with these conditions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVING FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

Each focus group which was conducted ultimately produced a number of recommendations regarding policy and services which need to be adopted and implemented by Government and related agencies in view of assisting socially excluded insofar as employment issues are concerned. The following are some commonalities between the recommendations which emanated from the different focus groups:

- a) The need for sensitization of employers and co-workers in regard to the problems and issues which socially excluded persons experience in general and possibly at the place of work;
- b) The need for customer-friendly and specialised training to be provided to government officials and persons dealing directly with socially excluded persons on issues of employment;
- c) The urgent need for extended and more accessible childcare facilities and/or childcare schemes which cater specifically for socially excluded persons in various parts of the country;
- d) The provision of specialised and targeted training (skills, adaptability, empowerment) for the different groups of socially excluded persons;
- e) The establishment of more structures which are aimed specifically at assisting groups of socially excluded persons in finding employment and in dealing with employment issues;
- f) The introduction and implementation of more positive discrimination measures (policy, schemes and incentives for the employment of socially excluded persons);
- g) Policy which seeks to ensure a substantial degree of complementarity between the social benefit system and employment opportunities for socially excluded persons (ie replacing the system as it is at present, where many socially excluded persons find that it pays more to simply remain on relief than to work and earn too little to get by)
- h) The need to address the issue of underpaid third country nationals – an issue which is affecting third country nationals themselves as well as Maltese persons in terms of entering employment;
- i) Policy aimed at the increased provision of flexicurity measures;
- j) The need to address discrimination and stereotypical attitudes, particularly during interviews and at the place of work;

- k) The importance of establishing volunteering structures which allow persons who are registered as unemployed (and receiving unemployment benefits) to gain hands-on skills which can also be recognised through a certification system;
- l) Improved transport facilities for socially excluded persons (disabled, etc) seeking to go to work and/or attend training courses;
- m) Increased involvement and consultation of socially excluded persons themselves (or representatives) in policy and decision-making processes.

6.2 Victims of Domestic Violence: Recommendations

6.2.1 Developing a system where paid work and relief benefits complement each other (replacing the system as is, where it pays to simply remain on relief);

6.2.2 Increased policy initiatives aimed at encouraging flexicurity measures (eg. flexibility by employers in allowing mothers to temporarily leave the workplace to pick up their children from school);

6.2.3 Provision of child-care facilities for persons suffering from domestic violence or staying in shelters. Another option could be the provision of transport services from shelters to existing child-care facilities;

6.2.4 Re-address the training courses being provided at ETC targeted at women. These need to be more effective in reaching their goal – engaging more women in employment. Provision of similar training courses in a more central location (eg Valletta) instead of Hal Far, due to high transport costs;

6.2.5 Provision of training courses for persons who have had to leave their marital or family home due to domestic violence. Such courses could include budgeting skills; empowerment skills; etc.

6.2.6 Addressing the high degree of discrimination in terms of employment a) against women with a domestic violence history b) against relatively older women (aged 45+) c) against single mothers and/or mothers in general;

6.2.7 Provision of customer oriented training to and sensitization of civil servants in dealing with persons who have experienced domestic violence;

6.2.8 Awareness raising, sensitization and training among employers and employees;

6.2.9 Establishing a requirement for government departments and companies to have psychologists or counsellors to whom employees with certain social problems (including domestic violence) can refer;

6.2.10 Setting up structured support groups of women who leave shelters – to provide support and guidance once a woman is out of protection and seeking to settle back into society (this is also important since some participants noted that social workers assigned to them do not always keep on following up or taking an interest in their case, especially once they leave the shelter);

6.2.11 Expedite the deliberation of domestic violence cases in front of the national courts. This will contribute to increased employment of socially excluded women who have a domestic violence history a) because they can plan ahead properly b) and that they may be ascertained the necessary protection and justice to allow them to go out to work with peace of mind (without fearing their perpetrators possible actions or abuse);

6.2.12 Enhance Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of paid work opportunities for women in shelters – encouraging large companies to involve the women in shelters in carrying out, for example, decorative or assembly work for the company;

6.2.13 Provision of a state lawyer specifically on domestic violence cases;

6.2.14 Establishing a specific service for domestic violence victims which includes the provision of structured assistance vis-à-vis employment (job-seeking, information on the social benefits system, training, empowerment, etc). Such a service would need to be complemented by specifically trained staff;

6.2.15 Launching a scheme for victims of domestic violence which encourages a degree of positive discrimination insofar as employment, child-care and the provision of relief are concerned.

6.3 Persons with literacy challenges: Recommendations

6.3.1 A structured system at ETC which identifies appropriate work (not only construction-related) for persons who have literacy difficulties and which provides guidance to such persons who are actively looking for a job;

6.3.2 A scheme where persons with literacy challenges who are registered with ETC remain eligible to some form of unemployment benefits while simultaneously being entitled/required to be engaged in community work (voluntary) or part-time paid work (eg. 10 hours a week). In this manner, they will be able to gain skills as well as hands-on experience which will ameliorate their chances of eventually ascertaining a full-time job;

6.3.3 There is need for front-desk officials and clerks, especially at ETC and job centres, to undergo customer-friendly and client-oriented skills training courses;

6.3.4 Anti-nepotism and anti-discrimination measures need to be further implemented;

6.3.5 Improved education systems in schools, in view of addressing the large number of youths experiencing literacy difficulties and early school-leavers;

6.3.6 Address the issue of underpaid Third Country Nationals (particularly those paid below the minimum wage) – since this in itself is also discriminatory against unemployed Maltese.

6.4 Older Persons (60+): Recommendations

6.4.1 Many elderly persons are interested in voluntary work. The government should acknowledge the voluntary work which elderly persons carry out, and should offer structures where elderly persons may get involved in voluntary work, Participants cited the following examples: community work, supervision in playgrounds, ex-nurses in voluntary care services – where there is also an application of skills and experience within a voluntary work setting etc;

6.4.2 National statistics need to reflect the economic value of voluntary work carried out by elderly persons (especially women) and the contributions they make to society in doing so;

6.4.3 Many elderly women are highly experienced in the provision of care – why should they not have the chance to be engaged for care services? Participants cited examples of lollypop ladies at schools in the UK and of care-workers/ assistants in child-care centres. Many older women are seeking to be pro-active and get involved in the community.

6.4.4 Policy should encourage the creation of cooperatives which engage elderly persons for light and appropriate jobs. In other European countries, such cooperatives coordinate job opportunities for elderly persons with big companies or institutions. These cooperatives could provide for training and re-skilling of elderly persons, as well as for the coordination of casual or temporary work required by companies or government. Training and the involvement in casual work provides the elderly person with self-satisfaction, allowing him/her to apply him/herself, and with a form of income, while simultaneously rendering a required service to the community or to a particular company.

6.4.5 A public registry needs to be established and managed, in view of keeping details of elderly persons who wish to work, even on a part-time basis. This will serve as a reference point when job opportunities arise.

6.4.6 In as far as EU and national policies affecting the elderly are concerned, the elderly themselves need to be involved within the decision-making processes. (Citing of the structure of the ex-Welfare Committee)

6.4.7 Need for life-long learning and the provision of training specifically oriented for elderly persons (example, for the provision of care services). Importance of re-skilling and adaptability;

6.4.8 Increased provision for flexicurity – especially in terms of encouraging the engagement of elderly persons;

6.4.9 Need for Maltese policy vis-à-vis active ageing. In such regard, it is important to have increased collaboration and synergy between the Ministry for Education and Employment, the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity, and the Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care. Unfortunately, anything that concerns the elderly tends to be perceived from a care or health-related lens, and therefore addressed mainly by the latter Ministry alone. There is more to the elderly than the provision of care services!

6.4.10 Due to ongoing demographic changes and their implications on the working population, it is important to provide for national statistics about the life-style of elderly persons and their employability.

6.4.11 There is a need for increased advocacy by trade unions vis-à-vis active aging and adequate pensions – especially for future generations due to the increasing life-expectancy.

6.5 Third Country Nationals: Recommendations

6.5.1 The system at ETC needs to be improved – especially in regard to TCNs seeking work:

- a) Follow-up on applications submitted by TCNs for employment is required;
- b) TCNs should be informed if they are paying tax, social security, etc, and what their rights are;
- c) ETC should have an office specifically set up for addressing queries and difficulties encountered by TCNs, for providing the latter with required information. There is currently no office in Malta which supports TCNs – especially whilst they are working;

6.5.2 There is also a need for dissemination of information about minimum conditions of work; tax requirements; social security; etc. Basic provisions within labour law need to be translated into layman's language and provided to TCNs (possibly also translated into various languages).

6.5.3 Need for an office or an authority where TCNs can file complaints about breaches of their employment rights and commence redress procedures;

6.5.4 Need for a representative body (trade union) for TCNs or for extended membership of existing trade unions to TCNs;

6.5.5 Reduced bureaucratic procedures to employ TCNs and to renew employment applications;

6.5.6 There needs to be a coherent national policy for TCNs and employment – even if implying that a quota approach will need to be adopted. Participants claimed: *'Malta needs TCNs in employment especially if it wants to see large projects through. We all know that if it were not for the large number of TCNs who were engaged, Mater Dei Hospital would not have been ready in 2007!!'*

6.5.7 Government needs to engage stronger and focused policies addressing discrimination and racist attitudes on the place of work. It also needs to ensure that TCNs are afforded with the same working rights and conditions as those given to Maltese and as those enforced through the Laws of Malta;

6.5.8 There needs to be an education campaign targeted at instilling the recognition and respect of human dignity among Maltese of TCNs;

6.5.9 Need to fight prejudices even by employers;

6.5.10 Democracy, non-discrimination and equality need to be reflected at decision-making levels. It is important for TCNs to be represented and consulted in policy-making procedures, allowing them to, *inter alia*, put forth suggestions for solutions to highlighted problems regarding the labour market and TCNs. *'How many TCNs are currently and actively involved or consulted in policy-making procedures?'*

6.5.11 While acknowledging that as of April 2007, the remit of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality had been extended to ensure the observation and application of non-discrimination and equality on the grounds of race and ethnic origin, it is equally important that these principles are reflected in the make-up of the same Commission, engaging TCNs who know or have experienced themselves some of the problems encountered by most foreigners living in Malta;

6.5.12 Increased and facilitated opportunities for education, life-long learning and training aimed at enhancing the adaptability of TCNs as per the demands of the local labour market (eg. IT and Smart City);

6.5.13 It is recommended that training services are also targeted towards female TCNs in residences. Such training should include the English language, due to communication difficulties which such women may encounter. They should also include skills training;

6.5.14 ETC should seek to target female TCNs living in Malta, especially insofar as the provision of training is concerned.

6.5.15 Initiatives are needed to provide opportunities to female immigrants who have children and are living in residences, to carry out crafts and group activities which could contribute towards covering their living expenses.

6.6 Persons suffering from Mental Illness: Recommendations

6.6.1 Government should set up volunteering structures for persons suffering from mental illness – involvement in voluntary work will not only help these persons to re-integrate into society and to apply themselves, but also to enhance their skills and employability, while also boosting their self-esteem and confidence;

6.6.2 Measures need to be undertaken to address existing stigma and stereotypes among employers and at the place of work in regard to persons suffering from mental illnesses and to psychiatric hospitals;

6.6.3 It is important that at the place of work, policy requires employers and superiors to react straight away when complaints filed by persons experiencing mockery or discriminatory actions by colleagues;

6.6.4 The adoption of by-laws ought to be encouraged whereby companies seek to actively employ mentally ill persons as part of their workforce;

6.6.5 Authorities and companies should not assume that persons suffering from a mental illness can only carry out manual work. Persons suffering from mental illness should have the opportunity to be engaged in administrative tasks if they so wish and have the right skills;

6.6.6 Policy should also seek to provide for (and encourage the provision of) appropriate skills training (including on-the-job training and apprenticeship) for persons suffering from a mental illness. Such training needs to be complemented with a certificate acknowledging the skills attained. Training should also be available on the job – allowing a person suffering from mental illness to better his skills in view of eventual promotions;

6.6.7 Work is a place for social integration and communication. It is therefore very important for mentally ill persons to be assisted in entering/ re-entering the labour market;

6.6.8 While all participants confirmed that they were happy on the whole with the services being offered by Richmond Foundation and the State in helping them to re-integrate into society, they noted that the social benefit provided to them is not always enough to get by. In particular, they suggested that there ought to be a sort of benefit or allowance provided to subsidize transport expenses for persons suffering from mental illness.

6.7 Persons with Disabilities: Recommendations

6.7.1 There needs to be increased investment in providing the proper educational provisions and opportunities for persons with disabilities (whether physical or intellectual) in view of enhancing their potential for future employment and empowering them;

6.7.2 A campaign among parents of children with disabilities is also required in view of encouraging and supporting them to empower their children and not over-protect them to the extent of treating them as incapable persons;

6.7.3 Policy needs to orient itself towards inclusion of persons with disabilities – however, it should not drive them to try to always fit into the mainstream. Policy needs to be simultaneously oriented towards equipping persons with knowing how to deal with their disability and how to adapt. For this reason, it is important that policy focuses on facilitating independent living of persons with disabilities;

6.7.4 Provision of training services is urgently required – particularly for the persons with visual impairment. Such training needs to focus on empowerment, adaptability, orientation and mobility;

6.7.5 The provision of continued education opportunities for persons with intellectual disability who are 16 years old and over is an urgent and immediate need;

6.7.6 Provision of life-long learning opportunities for persons with disabilities, especially for those with multiple disabilities, is also urgently required – empowering them and giving them the chance to better their positions even at work;

6.7.7 It is of utmost importance that all personnel involved in the training of persons with disability are themselves fully qualified and trained, according to EU level (e.g. Braille instructors);

6.7.8 Government policy needs to focus further on e-inclusion, investing in technology which persons with various disabilities can utilize. Furthermore, there needs to be an investment in a Maltese language synthesizer software which will allow computers to recognize the Maltese language. This is extremely important in terms of working documents which are written in Maltese only. The provision of a Maltese language synthesizer software is an urgent requirement if the visually impaired are to be able to compete for jobs or to get promotion, on an equal footing with the sighted.

6.7.9 There is need for more sensitivity and understanding by employers (actual and potential) as well as within government departments;

6.7.10 There is a need for positive discrimination and structured support for persons with intellectual disability both during unemployment and at the place of work. Structured, distinct and specialized assistance ought to be provided by ETC to persons with intellectual disability seeking employment. Furthermore, the state should provide for sheltered employment for persons who are not able to be on a normal place of work, but who can still contribute;

6.7.11 It is important that projects such as those run by ETC (eg the project under the ESF, entitled '*Supported Employment Scheme for Persons with Disability*'), are elaborated upon and continued;

6.7.12 Sheltered work/employment opportunities need to be established also for persons with multiple disabilities. Such workshops do not exist in Malta yet;

6.7.13 There is a need to instil a culture among employers to:

a) adapt a job and the manner in which it is executed in accordance with the person employed to do it, and not the other way around;

b) allow for task-orientation by employees (including for persons who have a mental disability and who might take longer to do so);

c) provide for flexicurity and flexi-time according to a person's needs;

6.7.14 A Scheme or Fund should be established in view of financially assisting persons who are suddenly disabled through an accident and who cannot carry on working (temporarily or permanently) as a result;

6.7.15 The State ought to provide a re-educational and re-skilling programme for persons who experience sudden disabilities. Such persons have a right to start afresh and the State should assist in such regard;

6.7.16 There is need to ensure that disabled persons who are working and earning a wage, do in fact deliver (giving their money's worth);

6.7.17 Improved transport facilities for persons who are disabled:

a) Increased sensitivity of public transport drivers to the needs of disabled persons (informing a intellectually disabled person or a blind person where he needs to stop – this could also be facilitated with the presentation of a disability card to the driver)

b) Improved transport facilities for persons with disabilities wishing to go to work / return. The current system of Dar il-Kaptan is good for persons working full time, since it functions at specific and fixed times. However it does not allow for persons working part-time to use it, especially if they need to return home at earlier or later hours. Furthermore, the service is rather expensive (Lm1.75 daily) – and even higher if it is used for purposes other than work. A participant explained that she had to pay Lm 10 one-way to attend an examination related to work but which took place in the evening.

6.7.18 Increased involvement of and consultation with disabled persons themselves (and parents of persons with intellectual disability) in decision-making processes. Furthermore, improved consultation is required particularly with NGOs representing disabled persons (*Why should an NGO need to lobby for over five years for the need to provide orientation and mobility training? Why are NGOs not listened to? Why, in the year 2007, the European Year for Equal Opportunities, are we still at the stage of discussing and planning the education of persons with intellectual disability after their 16 years of age?*)

6.8 Persons with a History of Substance Abuse: Recommendations

6.8.1 Schemes should be introduced whereby ETC and/or local councils assist ex-substance abusers to find work and/or incentivize employers to take on these persons;

6.8.2 Work opportunities need to be created for persons who have a tarnished police conduct and/or for ex-convicts;

6.8.3 There is a need for training courses to be offered on site for persons within rehabilitation programmes, who are not allowed to leave the residence due to restraining orders;

6.8.4 There is need for action, not just words, by Government in regard to the problems listed above.

6.9 Homeless Persons: Recommendations

6.9.1 There is need for child-care facilities to be offered to persons in certain situations such as homelessness;

6.9.2 The government should provide for appropriate work for homeless persons – work which allows for a degree of flexibility, especially for persons who have children to take care of and no one to fall back;

6.9.3 Regulations as to the Unemployment Register and Part II should have exceptions for persons in particular situations such as homelessness;

6.9.4 There is a significant degree of discrimination against men, especially within family cases and legal judgements – the courts need to be sensitive towards a man's situation (not only that of a woman) – especially if that man is homeless;

6.9.5 There is a need for positive discrimination towards homeless persons – similar to that shown towards persons with disabilities (eg. the policy/obligation of government to ensure that 2% of its workforce are disabled persons);

6.9.6 There is a need for sensitization among employers and governments itself about the problems which homeless persons have and about their needs.

6.10 Ex-convicts: Recommendations

6.10.1 There are some companies that employ ex-convicts. This should be further encouraged through the elaboration of schemes (such as those run by the Supported Employment Section at ETC);

6.10.2 There is a need for a new system of classification at prison which is based on the behaviour of in-mates (not on the nature of the crime one has committed). This would allow well-meaning persons to be identified and allowed to advance and improve their skills through training and possibly university courses, etc. It would also avoid situations where persons who wish to attend classes or carry out work do not do so because of fear of associating with other particular in-mates;

6.10.3 There is a need for specialized training of guards and members of staff in dealing with convicts within prison which is meant to serve as a 'correctional facility'. There is also a significant need for the employment of trained correctional officers at the national prison. In turn, more social workers need to be employed. There are too little for the whole prison;

6.10.4 At present, those persons with more than a two-year criminal sentence are allowed to leave prison and to go out to work during the last three months of their sentence. On the other hand, persons with less than a two-year sentence are not provided the possibility of going out to work in the last three months of their sentence. Such discrimination does not make sense and should not happen. Furthermore, government should offer a service which identifies six-month work placements for all convicts who are about to complete their sentence. Such a service would assist all persons alike in starting afresh;

6.10.5 There is an urgent need of sensitization among employers as to the difficulties which ex-convicts encounter when trying to re-integrate and enter back into the world of employment;

6.10.6 There should be increased and improved incentives for in-mates to attend training, educational and university courses. The participants explained that at present the prison authorities do not even provide pencils and paper to attend the courses offered within the prison quarters themselves. Furthermore, in-mates in certain divisions are categorically not allowed to attend on-site training/work/ or university courses;

6.10.7 The wide spread of drugs in prison cells needs to be addressed – especially since the majority of in-mates are on drugs and this in itself does not allow them to focus on work performance or skills improvement while serving their sentence;

6.10.8 There needs to be more work provided within the prison. Some companies do bring work to the prisons – however there is not enough for all prisoners.

6.10.9 *'The Maltese prisons are small and therefore should be manageable. It is obvious that government does not want to arrange the prison conditions. Nor does it wish to assist convicts through improved correctional measures. A country needs to have a prison I guess!'*

6.10.10 *'We have tried to voice our opinion several times on the conditions as prison and how they can be improved. However, we always found opposition and spokes in the wheels, especially when we tried to go public'*

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of the focus groups was to provide a platform for the various categories of socially excluded and disadvantaged persons to voice their concerns and issues vis-à-vis the world of employment. The focus groups were therefore geared towards providing a means by which Government, policy-makers and civil society organisations could acquire increased understanding of the difficulties and problems which such persons encounter when seeking to enter or remain in employment, and increased insight into the perceptions and views of these persons as to the main causes for such difficulties and problems. In turn, the exercise sought to elicit suggestions and recommendations in regard to policy improvements and practical solutions for social inclusion through employment.

EAPN Malta has evaluated the methodology used to carry out the focus groups. It is pleased with the outcome of presenting tailored case studies at the beginning of each focus group as this presented participants with particular features that are suggestive of real life situations. The case studies acted as beneficial ice-breakers as well as appreciated stimuli for discussion, something that was highly welcomed both by moderator and participant considering the personal and sensitive nature of the research. At the ending of each focus group the moderator noted how, through participants' detailed knowledge of their own personal experience as well as that of the other participants being in the 'same boat', they tended to confirm as well as dispute each other's responses to the research questions. Indeed, one can say that the focus groups took form of a consciousness-raising role as individuals-at-risk came together to share, challenge, and muse over their life experiences vis-à-vis employment.

Of course, this is not to say that the organisation and execution of the focus groups was problem-free. As the number of focus groups was notched up, the moderator's concerns correspondingly increased given that each group, in the event, was very different, and not just in content. No focus group could remain uncontaminated by factors which encroached and undermined important standards such as gender and age ratios of participants as well as inevitable and last-minute 'no shows'.

However, EAPN Malta opines that despite such 'natural' nuisances, the focus groups succeeded in *creating a discursive space in which alternate discourses could be held*.

The latter statement brings us to highlight once again the series title which guided this research – namely, *Listening and Giving a Voice*. The ultimate objective of this exercise was not to gauge some levels in extremely accurate and scientific measures. Instead, it was to practise a form of dialogic democratisation by providing disadvantaged and subaltern individuals an opportunity for participation, representation and dialogue which can contribute substantially, perhaps even decisively, to the reconstruction of social solidarity and the improvement of a post-welfare state. It is within this context that the authors of this report and EAPN Malta made the choice to leave the participants' opinions as untreated as possible without any cosmetic interference from academic and policy experts (sic).

The conclusions of these focus groups should be viewed in the light of Malta's current policy and measures in addressing employment issues of socially excluded persons and disadvantaged groups. Malta's policy, which is guided by the principles of social inclusion and equal opportunities, is mainly coordinated by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). Through its Supported Employment Section, ETC offers a number of specialized and valuable services for various disadvantaged groups (including 'Employment Training Placement Schemes', 'On-line Training Schemes', 'Bridging the Gap Scheme', as well as customized services for ex-substance abusers and for ex-convicts)

In conclusion, the results of the focus groups conducted on behalf of EAPN Malta might not necessarily imply that Government does not provide adequate services for the socially excluded / disadvantaged vis-à-vis employment,

but rather that what might be required is increased awareness-raising and outreach to disadvantaged and socially excluded groups.

The concept which Government, policy-makers and civil society organizations need to bear in mind when analyzing the results of these focus groups is listening to and understanding the causes behind what was said.

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ANNEX I

EAPN Malta Focus Groups - Case-Study used for Merhba Bik

18th July 2007, 6th August 2007

Emma has recently left her marriage home because she was being abused by her husband. Emma is now at a home for battered wives. She lives there together with her four-year old son and her ten-year old daughter.

One day, Emma decides to go for a walk for some fresh air. She goes to a park and sits down on a bench, admiring the nature around her and thinking about her life and her children. She feels lonely and lost...Two minutes later, a woman comes jogging down the pathway and stops to have a rest close to the bench where Emma was sitting. She looks up and smiles. Emma acknowledges her and comments about the beautiful weather. The two start chatting and after a while introduce themselves to each other. Emma feels comfortable and starts to relate how lonely and lost she's been feeling. The young woman asks whether Emma goes out at all and whether she works. Emma explains that since she's been living at the shelter she has found it difficult to find a job. The young woman asks her why. Emma explains....

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Emma said?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which persons with a domestic violence background encounter when they are unemployed?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which persons with a domestic violence background encounter when looking for a job?
- Do persons with a domestic violence background encounter problems when they are employed?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and persons with a domestic violence background, what would it be?

ANNEX II

EAPN Malta Focus Group - Case-Study used for Paolo Freire Institute

20th July 2007

Gorg ghandu 32 il-sena u qatt ma' tghallem jikteb jew jaqra. Spicca mill-iskola meta kellu hmistax u wara beda jahdem ma' missieru li kien mekanik.

Meta kellu 25 il-sena, iltaghqa ma' Maria u wara seghntejn iddecidew jizzewgu. Minn dak in-nhar il-quddiem, Maria hadet hsieb il-finanzi tad-dar u li l-kontijiet li rcewew jithalsu. Gorg kien baqgha jahdem bhala mekanik ma' missieru, sakem milhux, missieru miet. Ix-xoghol ma' l-ewwel beda jitnaqqas hafna. Ghalhekk, Gorg iddecieda illi jbiegh il-garaxx ta' missieru u li jipprova jsib xoghol iehor. Mar jirregistra mal-ETC. Imma, tlett xhur ghaddew u Gorg baqa jsieba difficili jsib xoghol (full-time).

Wara ftit qisu beda jaqta qalbu. Fl-istess hin beda jinduna illi mhux ser ikun faccili jsib xoghol bla ma jaf jaqra u jikteb. Minn barra hekk qisu beda jiddejjaq illi ma' setax jaqra ittri ndirizzati lilu u li l-mara biss kienet tkun tista taqrom.

Darba ntaghqa ma habib il-kazin u bdew jittkelmu. Gorg fetah qalbu mieghu u beda jirrakonta kif kien qed ihossu...

Mistoqsijiet

- X'tahseb li qal Gorg?
- Fl-opinjoni tieghek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw in-nies illi ma jafux jaqraw jew jiktbu meta m'ghandhomx xoghol? X'impatt ta' escluzzjoni mid-dinja tax-xoghol hemm fuq persuni illi jsoffru in-nies li ma jaffux jiktbu jew jaqraw?
- Fl-opinjoni tieghek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw in-nies illi ma jafux jaqraw jew jiktbu, meta jkunu qeddien jippruvaw isibu xoghol?
- Nies illi ma' jafux jiktbu jew jaqraw, jesperjensaw problemi fix-xoghol taghhom jew fuq il-post tax-xoghol?
- Jekk tista' taghmel suggeriment lill-gvern f'dak li ghandu x'jaqsam max-xoghol u n-nies illi ma' jafux jiktbu jew jaqraw, xi jkun?

ANNEX III

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with elderly persons

20th July 2007

Paul and Rita were looking forward to Paul's retirement from work. Paul had worked at the same place, the Malta Drydocks, for as much as 41 years. He has always dreamt of a period of time in which he could be active in those roles that gave him much pleasure and satisfaction. Paul saw himself as working part-time, some 15 hours a week, volunteering in his spare time and taking long walks with Rita in the cool summer evenings. On her part, Rita looked forward to the day that Paul would hand in his boiler suit once and for all, and have more quality time to spend with her.

The day arrived but the years following it did not evolve as they anticipated. Paul failed in securing a part-time job. Many employers did not even grant him a chance because of his age. Others noted to him that he was computer illiterate, and therefore unemployable.

Paul tried to compensate for such frustrations by joining the volunteering sector. But even here, he experienced several stumbling blocks. Most organizations preferred younger volunteers since the volunteering opportunities they offered demanded long hours, something that Paul's health did not allow him to consent.

Rita's life also failed to develop as she had eagerly expected. Her mum was admitted to St. Vincent de Paule Residence. To visit her it took her one hour thirty minutes to reach the place even if she lived only a few kilometers away. Furthermore, her daughter depended on her to take care of her two children during her summer holidays as she did not have enough leave.

Questions for discussion

- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which elderly persons encounter when they do not work? What is the impact of exclusion from paid work for elderly persons?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which elderly persons encounter when looking for a job?
- Do elderly encounter problems and difficulties when they are employed? If so, what are kind of problems and/or difficulties?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and elderly persons, what would it be?

ANNEX IV

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with Third Country Nationals

1st August 2007

Case-study

Ashraf has been in Malta for ten months now. He managed to have refugee status acknowledged by the authorities and is now trying to find a job which fits his qualifications. He is an engineer by profession. Up to now, he has been working on a part-time basis as a builder. However, now he wants to find something closer to his area of specialization.

Ashraf sends a number of applications to companies and attends a few interviews. However, he receives little feedback. He spends six months applying for jobs. He feels very frustrated, and one day meets a Maltese friend and opens up with him.

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Ashraf said?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which immigrants encounter when looking for a job in Malta?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which immigrants encounter when they are unemployed? How do you think exclusion from paid work impacts on an immigrant in Malta?
- Do immigrants encounter problems when they are employed? What kind?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and immigrants, what would it be?

ANNEX V

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with persons suffering from a mental illness

27th July 2007

John ghandu 26 il-sena u jsoffri minn marda mentali. Għadu kif tellaq minn sptar psikatrika wara ftit xhur illi kien iqgħad hemm hekk. U issa mar jghix go apartament gdid bl-ghajnuna ta' Richmond Foundation.

John jinsab kuntent hafna u jrid issir indipendenti u jibda jghix hajja normali. Huh, Alex, jmur izuru fl-apartament il-gdid, u jissugerixxi illi iwentwalment John imissu jipprova jsib ix-xogħol, anke jekk part-time għal bidu, għax il-fatt illi jkun qiegħed jahdem jista' jghinu jissetilja fis-socjeta.

John ihossu daqxejn xettiku f'dan ir-rigward, għax ma' jafx minn fejn jaqbad jibda. Alex jiddecidi li jghinu jikteb ittra lill-kumpaniji li forsi għandhom xogħol għalih, u li jghinu ukoll jikteb il-CV tiegħu.

Wara ftit gimghat, Alex jerga' imur jara lill-huh, u jistaqsih jekk għadu ma' irciva xi telefonata għal xi intervju. John jipprova ma jweggibx il-mistoqsija u jipprova jbiddel id-diskors. Imma, Alex jerga' jistaqsih, u John jibda jispjega kif qiegħed ihossu...

Mistoqsijiet

- X'tahseb li qal John?
- Fl-opinjoni tiegħek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw in-nies illi jsoffru minn mard mentali, meta m'għandhomx xogħol? X'impatt ta' escluzzjoni mid-dinja tax-xogħol hemm fuq persuni illi jsoffru minn mard mentali?
- Fl-opinjoni tiegħek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw in-nies illi jsoffru minn mard mentali, meta jkunu qeddien jippruvaw isibu xogħol?
- Nies illi jsoffru minn mard mentali, jesperjensaw problemi fix-xogħol tagħhom jew fuq il-post tax-xogħol?
- Jekk tista' tagħmel suggeriment lill-gvern f'dak li għandu x'jaqsam max-xogħol u n-nies illi jsoffru minn mard mentali, xi jkun?

ANNEX VI

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with persons with a disability

27th July 2007

Case-study (Part I)

Nikki is twenty-one years old. He was born with a disability, but always tried to live a normal life. He is now determined to find a job which will keep him occupied, and through which he can earn a living. Over the last few weeks, Nikki has applied for a number of jobs and has also attended a few interviews. However, he has never been contacted back or offered a job.

Nikki decides to meet up with his favourite cousin, Andrew, and to go out for an ice-cream. When they meet, Nikki is in a bad mood and is not as talkative as he would usually be. Andrew notices that Nikki is not his usual self and asks him what the matter is. Nikki begins to explain how frustrated he is feeling. He explains that job-hunting experience is not proving very successful and that he thinks it is because of his disability....

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Nikki said next?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which persons like Nikki (with a congenital disability) encounter when looking for a job?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which persons with a congenital disability encounter when they are unemployed? How do you think exclusion from paid work impacts on a person with a disability?

Case-study (Part I)

... Andrew empathizes with Nikki's situation and explains that he too is going through a touch time. Andrew explains that probably due to his recent accident and the disability which it caused, he will probably have to give up his job. Although his employer has kept the post open for him until he recovers, his permanent injury will not allow him to carry out his work anymore. For this reason, Andrew explains that he has already written a letter of resignation. He explains that eventually he would want to find another job, since he needs to sustain his family. However, he does not know where to start from...

- Do persons with a disability encounter any problems when they are employed?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems and difficulties which persons who suffer from a sudden form of disability, encounter in terms of employment? How do you think exclusion from paid work impacts on them?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and persons with a disability, what would it be?

ANNEX VII

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with persons with a drug history

23rd August 2007

Mireille is thirty-four years old. She has just come out from rehabilitation due to her previous drug addiction and is now trying to start a new life. She would like to rent out an apartment and find a job. She starts looking out in newspapers and goes to agencies. She draws up her CV, indicating that she had gone to university for some years. She sends letters to potential employers and phones up to see if she can get an interview.

One day, she decided to go for a walk. She bumps into an old school friend and starts chatting. Her friend, who knew her very well at school, realized that Mireille was not in the best of moods, and asks her whether everything is fine. Mireille smiles and then relates her drug problem to her friend who had not seen her for a few years now.

Her friend encourages her and praises her for coming out of her drug problem. However Mireille still sounds dishearted and starts to talk about her job-hunting experience...

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Mireille said next?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which persons with a background of drug or alcohol addiction encounter when they are unemployed?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which persons with a background of drug or alcohol addiction encounter when looking for a job?
- Do persons with a background of drug or alcohol addiction encounter problems when they are employed?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and persons with a background of drug or alcohol addiction, what would it be?

ANNEX VIII

EAPN Malta Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with homeless persons

24th August 2007

Manuela, a 25 year old, and her child, are temporary residents at a shelter for homeless persons. She has been there for five weeks, and has applied for housing. She has also started to look for a job to sustain herself and her child. The social workers at the shelter help her to apply for jobs.

One fine afternoon, Manuela decides to go for a walk for some fresh air. She goes to a public garden and sits down on a bench for a rest. Manuela starts thinking about her situation, and begins to feel sad...

Two minutes later, a woman comes jogging down the pathway and stops to have a rest close to the bench where Manuela was sitting. She looks up and smiles. Manuela acknowledges her.

The two start chatting and after a while they introduce themselves to each other. Manuela starts to relate her situation and how difficult she is finding it to move on in her life. The young woman asks whether Manuela works, and Manuela explains that she is not finding it very easy to find a job. The young woman asks her why and Manuela explains....

Questions for discussion

- What do you think Manuela said?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which homeless persons (or persons in a shelter) encounter when they are unemployed?
- What, in your opinion, are the main problems which homeless persons (or persons in a shelter) encounter when looking for a job?
- Do homeless persons (or persons in a shelter) encounter problems when they are employed?
- If you had to make a suggestion to the government about employment and homeless persons (or persons in a shelter), what would it be?

ANNEX VIII

EAPN Focus Group Case-Study used for the focus group with ex-convicts

14th September 2007

John ghandu 36 sena u ghadu kif hareg mill-habs wara tlett snin. Jinsab kuntent hafna ghax jista jerga jibda jghix hajja normali mal-familja – mal-mara u t-tfal tieghu.

Fl-istess hin, qiegħed ihossu daqxejn bezghan ghax ma' jafx jekk ser jirnexxielu jsib ix-xogħol.

Huh, Alex, jinduna illi John ma jafx minn fejn ser jaqbgħad jibda u jiddeciedi jghinu jikteb lill-kumpaniji lli forsi għandhom xogħol għalih.

John imur għal diversi intervisti, imma jibqa ihossu xettiku u mdejjaq. Alex jipprova jittellem mieghu biex jghinu, u John jibda jiftah qalbu mieghu...

Mistoqsijiet

- X'tahseb li qal John lill-huh?
- Fl-opinjoni tiegħek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw in-nies meta johorgu mill-habs u m'għandhomx xogħol? X'impatt ta' eskluzzjoni mid-dinja tax-xogħol hemm fuq persuni li kienu l-habs?
- Fl-opinjoni tiegħek, x'inhuma il-problemi u il-diffikultajiet illi jaffaccaw persuni li darba kienu l-habs, meta jkunu qegħdin jippruvaw isibu xogħol?
- Nies li darba kienu l-habs, jesperjensaw problemi fuq il-post tax-xogħol?
- Jekk ikollok tagħmel suggeriment lill-gvern fuq ix-xogħol u nies li johorgu mill-habs, xi jkun?